

Fat cats

A Yorkshire Cat Rescue Guide

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Obesity in cats can have several health implications. Overweight cats are more likely to suffer from diabetes, heart problems and arthritis and are more likely to die younger. Obesity in cats is now quite common with 50% of cats estimated to be overweight reflecting the same problems in people. However, as it is people controlling a cat's diet it is up to us as owners to ensure our cats are fit and healthy. It is difficult for cats to lose weight once they are obese so we have a few hints to help you get your feline trim.

First things first – the vet trip

Get your cat checked by a vet as there are medical conditions that may cause obesity and you need to rule these out. A lot of vets run free 'fat pet' clinics. These are an excellent resource where you can get accurate weighing of your cat and good advice about feeding. If you adopted your cat from Yorkshire Cat Rescue your cat will have been seen by a vet if we were concerned about their health.

Diet

A lot of obesity is caused by free-feeding, allowing your cat to eat what they want when they want. Some cats regulate their intake but others do not. If your cat is overweight you will need to feed set amounts in two, four or many small meals a day.

Wet food is better than dry as it has fewer calories and fewer carbohydrates. There are specialist wet foods including Royal Canin's™ obesity food and Hills™ r/d. These are more expensive than standard brands and can only be bought from pet shops but they are a good choice. Alternatively foods listed as 'diet' or for indoor cats will have fewer calories. Make sure your cat just has water to drink and that it is always available. If you are feeding dry food try using ball feeders and food mazes that not only keep your cat occupied they also slow down eating making your cat feel fuller.

Do not stave your cat as this will only make things worse, making their metabolism slower and them more greedy when food arrives. Staving can itself lead to other health conditions and complications. Do not feed treats when your cat is meowing and begging as this just encourages the begging behaviour. If you want to give your cat a treat then you can feed small amounts of high protein treats such as fish or chicken occasionally. Responding to your cats demands by play, grooming or stroking will reinforce your bond without piling on the pounds.

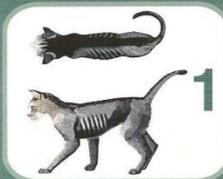
Exercise

The more active your cat is the more they will lose weight. Playing games with your cat will help them lose weight and will be enjoyable for them. This is particularly good for cats that are kept indoors. Wand toys are very good for getting your cat moving, try and change their toys to keep them interested in them. If you use laser spot toys to play with your cat make sure you can give them something to catch (like a soft toy mouse) after they have been chasing the spot otherwise they can become very frustrated.

Body condition scoring

Not sure if your cat is overweight or not? There are now body condition guides, produced mainly by pet food suppliers, to help owners work out whether their cat is overweight and what body shape they are aiming for. This is the one from Purina™.

BODY CONDITION SYSTEM

TOO THIN	1	Ribs visible on shorthaired cats; no palpable fat; severe abdominal tuck; lumbar vertebrae and wings of ilia easily palpated.] 
	2	Ribs easily visible on shorthaired cats; lumbar vertebrae obvious with minimal muscle mass; pronounced abdominal tuck; no palpable fat.	
	3	Ribs easily palpable with minimal fat covering; lumbar vertebrae obvious; obvious waist behind ribs; minimal abdominal fat.	
	4	Ribs palpable with minimal fat covering; noticeable waist behind ribs; slight abdominal tuck; abdominal fat pad absent.	
IDEAL	5	Well-proportioned; observe waist behind ribs; ribs palpable with slight fat covering; abdominal fat pad minimal.] 
TOO HEAVY	6	Ribs palpable with slight excess fat covering; waist and abdominal fat pad distinguishable but not obvious; abdominal tuck absent.] 
	7	Ribs not easily palpated with moderate fat covering; waist poorly discernible; obvious rounding of abdomen; moderate abdominal fat pad.	
	8	Ribs not palpable with excess fat covering; waist absent; obvious rounding of abdomen with prominent abdominal fat pad; fat deposits present over lumbar area.	
	9	Ribs not palpable under heavy fat cover; heavy fat deposits over lumbar area, face and limbs; distention of abdomen with no waist; extensive abdominal fat deposits.	