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NEWS & EVENTS

Resolve to Improve Your Pet's Health in 2015

Each year nearly half of American adults make New Year's resolutions. With obesity on the rise, losing weight and exercising more are two of the most common pledges, according to the Journal of Clinical Psychology.

But people aren't the only ones who could benefit from these resolutions. The Association for Pet Obesity Prevention estimates that in the U.S. nearly 53 percent of dogs and 58 percent of cats are overweight or obese.

"Obesity is a significant health concern for both people and pets and can be a debilitating disease in both species," said Allison Wara, DVM, clinical instructor in the MU College of Veterinary Medicine. "Obesity predisposes pets to a variety of conditions including — but not limited to — joint disease, decreased quality of life and a decreased lifespan."

Wara is the program director of the new [Renew Animal Clinic](#) at the MU Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital. The clinic's mission is to provide state-of-the-art techniques in physical rehabilitation and nutritional management in order to maximize a pet's recovery process, mobility and overall well-being.

Through inpatient or outpatient care, patients can receive physical therapy using modalities such as an underwater treadmill as well as a customized nutrition plan.

"Targeted nutrition and physical rehabilitation are proven modalities for facilitating successful outcomes after surgery, minimizing the incidence and progression of various diseases, and enhancing quality of life for our dogs and cats," Wara said.

One of the clinic's first patients was Bear, an older black Labrador retriever with polyarthritis, an arthritic condition that affects more than one joint. In the summer, Bear participates in low-impact activities such as swimming, but in the winter he is less active, which leads to increased discomfort and weight gain. His owners brought him to the clinic for physical rehabilitation and a weight-loss plan to assist with his joint disease and to restore

Tips for a Healthy New Year

As in humans, obesity in pets can lead to a variety of health conditions. Allison Wara, DVM, program director of the Renew Animal Clinic, offers tips to pet owners looking to manage their pet's weight.

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Thanks to rehabilitation sessions on an underwater treadmill and a customized diet, Bear, a black Labrador retriever with

him to his ideal body condition.

Bear visits the VMTH three days each week for hydrotherapy with the use of an underwater treadmill, which promotes active range of motion of his joints and strengthening of his muscles. He has also received an individualized weight-loss plan with a prescription weight-loss diet to help manage his arthritis. Weight reduction has been shown to reduce the pain and impact on arthritic joints and improve overall mobility, Wara said.

Since Bear began the program in October, his owners have noticed positive changes in his activity and comfort level at home, Wara said. He is more willing to go for walks, and his endurance level during walks has improved. The clinic team has been able to increase the resistance and duration of his treadmill sessions, changes that Bear has tolerated well.

Bear has been losing weight at a slow and steady rate, which is the goal for long-term success, Wara said.

The Renew Animal Clinic treats both dogs and cats. Wara said overweight pets with a history of orthopedic and/or neurologic disease are among the most frequently seen patients. However, the clinic also works with pets that are underweight or have muscle loss and require physical therapy for rehabilitation and recovery.

The clinic is co-directed by specialty board-certified veterinarians, including Derek Fox, DVM, PhD (surgery); Joan Coates, DVM, MS (neurology); and Robert Backus, MS, DVM, PhD (nutrition).

Learn more about the clinic at http://www.vmtm.missouri.edu/rehab_nutritional_clinic.html or on its Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/MUPetNutritionRehab>. For more information, call the VMTH at 882-7821 and ask to speak to Allison Wara, director and veterinarian, or certified canine rehabilitation practitioners Stephanie Gilliam and Adrienne Siddens.

polyarthritis, has been steadily losing weight at the VMTH's new Renew Animal Clinic. Weight reduction has been shown to reduce the pain and impact on arthritic joints and improve overall mobility.



Dogs aren't the only pets who can benefit from the Renew Animal Clinic; cats are welcome, too. Walking on the VMTH's underwater treadmill helped Sunshine, pictured above, lose weight while also taking pressure off of his joints.

Manage Your Pet's Weight: Tips for a Healthy New Year

As in humans, obesity in pets can lead to a variety of health conditions. Epidemiological studies have associated overweight dogs with disorders such as orthopedic disease, insulin resistance, pancreatitis, neoplasias, cardiorespiratory compromise and increased risk for anesthesia. In cats, obesity is a risk factor for diabetes mellitus, hepatic lipidosis, lameness, lower urinary tract disease and dermatological disease.

Scientific research has shown that dogs maintained at a lean body weight lived longer, and were considerably healthier, than overweight or obese dogs.

Allison Wara, DVM, program director of the Renew Animal Clinic, offers the following advice to pet



Dr.

Allison Wara, DVM

owners:

Use a Body Condition Score system to monitor your pet at home. There are several methods available; the VMTH uses [this one](#). With this system, a BCS of 4 or 5 out of 9 is considered normal and healthy for dogs, while a BCS of 5 out of 9 is healthy in cats. Each unit increase in BCS above 5 is approximately equal to 10 to 15 percent above ideal body weight. By monitoring body weight and BCS, you can more easily determine your pet's ideal body weight and recognize weight gain sooner.

Ask your veterinarian for advice to detect early signs of obesity and implement a treatment and prevention plan. Together, you and your veterinarian can work as advocates for your pet's long-term health and wellness.

Meal-feed your dog or cat instead of leaving food available all day (free-feeding). This is especially important for indoor cats that have less opportunity for exercise and may eat out of boredom. Aim for at least two to three meals per day.

Measure each meal accurately. Use a standard 8-ounce measuring cup or gram scale to ensure that portion control is achieved.

Limit the amount of treats, snacks and human foods your pet consumes. Focus instead on spoiling them through one-on-one interaction, play sessions with new toys and physical activities such as walking. Use interactive toys, balls or laser pointers to promote physical activity in any environment. If treats are necessary, a general rule of thumb is to ensure that treats contribute to less than 10 percent of the pet's daily calorie intake so as to avoid unbalancing the diet.

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