

How Do I Determine if My Cat is Overweight?

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Q. When is a cat considered to be fat?

A. Veterinarians often use a 9 point scoring system to evaluate the body condition of pets. A point value of 1 means the cat is extremely thin to the point of emaciation. A score of 9 means the pet is grossly overweight. And like Goldilocks and the three bears, a score of 5 is 'just right.' To determine body score, there are several specific areas of the cat we look at. Remember, these are guidelines.

NOTE: We have included some illustrations at the end of this article which depict the contours of various body scores.

To perform the rating, we first feel the cat's ribs. We should be able to quite easily feel the ribs. There should be a slight amount of fat over them, but each rib should be distinct. If you can see the ribs, the pet is too thin. If you can not feel them at all, the pet is very overweight.

Second, check the area near the base of the tail. There should be a slight fat covering over this area and it should feel smooth. If the bones protrude, the pet is too thin; if you can not feel any bones at all, the pet is very overweight.

Third, feel other bony prominences on the pet's body such as the spine, shoulders, and hips. Again, you should be able to feel a small amount of fat over these areas. If these bones are easily felt or visible, the cat is too thin. If you can not feel the bones beneath the layer of fat, the animal is obviously overweight.

Fourth, look at your cat from above. The animal should have a definite waist behind the ribs. If the waist is extreme, or again, bony prominences are visible, the animal is too thin. If there is no waist, or worse yet, the area between the ribs and hips is wider than the hips or ribs, the cat is grossly overweight.

Fifth, look at the cat from the side. Cats should have an abdominal tuck, i.e., the area behind the ribs should be smaller in diameter than the chest. An animal who is too thin will have a very severe abdominal tuck. Overweight animals will have no abdominal tuck.

If you feel your cat is overweight, consult your veterinarian to determine if there are any other medical problems before starting the animal on a weight reduction program. Your veterinarian can also suggest various diets, how fast your pet should lose weight, etc. (Overweight cats can become severely ill if their diet is too restricted.)

Very Thin
Body Score = 1



Thin
Body Score = 3



Ideal
Body Score = 5



Overweight
Body Score = 7



Obese
Body Score = 9

