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U.S. Pets Get Fatter, Owners Disagree with Veterinarians on Nutritional Issues

The Association for Pet Obesity Prevention Reports Record Number of Overweight Pets in U.S. in 2016, Pet Owners Disagree with Veterinarians on Key Pet Food Issues

Ocean Isle, North Carolina – February 21, 2017 – Pet obesity in the U.S. continued to steadily increase in 2016, affecting nearly 59% of cats and 54% of dogs, according to the [Association for Pet Obesity Prevention](#) (APOP). During the ninth annual survey, APOP also found pet owners and veterinary professionals disagreed on key pet food issues such as the benefits of corn and grains, value of raw and organic diets, and the best sources of pet nutritional advice.

“Obesity continues to be the greatest health threat to dogs and cats.” states APOP Founder, veterinarian Dr. Ernie Ward. “Obesity is a disease that kills millions of pets prematurely, creates immeasurable pain and suffering, and costs pet owners tens of millions of dollars in avoidable medical costs.”

In the October 2016 clinical survey, 53.9% of dogs and 58.9% of cats were classified as overweight (body condition score (BCS) 4) or obese (BCS 5) by their veterinary healthcare professional. That equals an estimated 41.9 million dogs and 50.5 million cats are too heavy, based on 2016 pet population projections provided by the American Pet Products Association (APPA). In 2015, APOP found 53.8% of dogs and 58.2% were overweight or obese.

Pet owners and veterinary professionals were questioned about pet obesity, diet and nutrition, and sources of pet food advice. When asked to classify their own pet’s weight, 81% of pet owners and 87% of veterinary professionals reported they were a normal and healthy weight. 98% of veterinary clinic staff agreed that pet obesity was a problem in the U.S., compared to about 87% of pet owners. Nearly all pet owners and veterinary professionals (greater than 95%) believed an overweight pet is at increased risk of pain and suffering and that quality nutrition can extend life expectancy.

Quality was the primary influence when purchasing pet food by over 80% of pet owners and 82% of veterinary staff. Price (16%) or location and convenience (7%) were not reported as significant factors for either group when choosing food for their dog or cat. Both pet owners and veterinary professionals (55%) said they worried about the quality of their pet’s food affecting the long-term health of their dog or cat.

Pet owners and veterinary professionals disagreed on whether their veterinarian discussed their pet’s ideal weight. Over 93% of pet owners stated they visited their veterinarian within the past year, yet only 49% reported their vet discussed their pet’s ideal weight, while over 60% of veterinary professionals claimed they did. Less than 4% of pet owners stated they felt guilty or uncomfortable when their veterinarian talked about their pet’s weight with them.

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Only 42% of pet owners agreed their veterinarian should recommend a maintenance diet, compared to over 64% of veterinarians. Only 39% of pet owners recalled their veterinary clinic recommended a maintenance diet, while about 48% of veterinary professionals stated they offered routine diet recommendations.

When asked where they obtained the best sources of dietary recommendations for their pet, over 46% of pet owners rated online advice as the best method, compared to 19% of veterinary professionals.

Pet owners and veterinary professionals were sharply divided on pet food ingredients and types of dog and cat diets.

- Do you think low- or no-grain diets are healthier for dogs?
61% pet owners and 25% veterinary professionals agreed with this statement
- Do you think raw diets are healthier for dogs and cats?
35% pet owners and 15% veterinary professionals agreed
- Do you think organic pet foods are healthier?
 - 43% pet owners and 23% veterinary professionals agreed
- Do you think corn is healthy for dogs?
 - 73% of pet owners disagreed while 48% veterinary professionals agreed

About the Research

The annual obesity prevalence survey is conducted by APOP. Veterinary practices assessed the body condition scores of every dog and cat patient they saw for a regular wellness exam on a given day in October. Body condition scores based on a five-point scale and actual weight were used in classifying pets as either underweight, thin, ideal, overweight or obese. The 2016 survey included the assessment of 1,224 dogs and 682 cats by 187 veterinary clinics.

Dogs (n=1,224)			Cats (n=682)		
Body condition score (1 to 5)			Body condition score (1 to 5)		
1	(6)	0.5%	1	(7)	1%
2	(17)	1.4%	2	(21)	3.1%
3	(542)	44.3%	3	(252)	37%
4	(417)	34.1%	4	(191)	28%
5	(242)	19.8%	5	(211)	30.9%

The online questionnaire was completed by 1,172 pet owners and 445 veterinary professionals from October 12 to December 31, 2016.

About the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP)

The Association for Pet Obesity Prevention is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 2005 by Dr. Ernie Ward with the primary mission of documenting pet obesity levels in the United States to raise awareness of the issue and its negative impact on pets. The APOP Board of Directors is made up of veterinary practitioners, nutritionists, surgeons, and internal medicine specialists. APOP conducts annual research to substantiate pet obesity prevalence levels in the United States and offers resources and tools to veterinarians and pet owners to better equip them to recognize and fight pet obesity. More information about APOP can be found on their website www.PetObesityPrevention.org.

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