



Losing Weight

Weight loss for no apparent reason is a cause for concern and needs to be investigated. Some serious diseases can cause your pet to lose weight. The good news is that many of them can be controlled, especially when found at an early stage.

Some pets develop a poor appetite and start eating less. They then lose weight. We need to find out why your pet doesn't want to eat as much. This may be something relatively simple such as a bad tooth that makes eating painful.



Eating but Losing Weight

A pet that is eating either normally or excessive amounts and losing weight, however, is a bigger concern. An overactive thyroid can increase your cat's metabolism and your cat can't eat enough to keep up.

Cancer could be causing your pet's body to use up the energy from food faster than your pet can eat. With diabetes, there isn't enough insulin to help the sugar from food get into the body's cells. Your pet eats more to try to compensate.

Your pet might not have enough digestive enzymes to digest the food and it "runs right through". Some pets have an intestinal disease that isn't allowing food to be digested or absorbed correctly. All of these situations can lead to your pet losing weight.

Normal Reasons

There are several reasons why your pet may be losing weight when it's not due to a medical problem. These are usually easy to fix once you figure out what is happening. The first thing to consider is whether your pet is eating a different food, different treats, or exercising more.

If you have changed foods recently, the new food may have fewer calories or your pet may not like it as much and is eating less of it. The same thing could be happening with treats.

Your pet may also be getting less food or treats than before. Often if several people in the home are feeding the pet, you don't always know how much the other person is giving. One person may decide the pet needs to lose weight so they start decreasing the food.

Have you decided to get in shape and are taking the dog with you? He may be getting more exercise and needs more food to keep up. Your cat may be getting more exercise if there are birds active outdoors that make him run between windows. If you moved recently to a house with stairs, your pet may be going up and down them a lot. It may be something simple that you never thought about.

If your pet spends time outdoors and the weather has gotten cold, he may be using more calories to stay warm. Increase his food to compensate for how much more he is burning.

Is your pet under stress? This can happen if you move, a new member (human or pet) joins or leaves the family, construction is happening in or near the house, a change in routine, or anything else that is different or possibly frightening. Some pets don't eat well under these circumstances and may lose weight because of it.

Keep a close eye on your pets when changes happen to make sure they are still eating well. If stress seems to be an issue, try calming supplements or other techniques to reduce stress.

Some older pets, usually in their teens, will lose muscle mass due to the aging process. This will make your pet look thinner and he will lose some weight. Older pets are also more likely to have certain diseases, so an exam is always important for older pets.



Diseases

There are quite a few medical reasons why your pet may be losing weight.

- Kidney disease
- Hyperthyroidism in cats (over-active thyroid)
- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Liver disease
- Dental disease
- Intestinal disease
- Pancreatic insufficiency (not enough enzymes to digest food)
- Feline Leukemia Virus or Feline Immunodeficiency Virus in cats
- Infections

Find the Cause

Tests are necessary to discover the cause. This usually starts with a blood count, thyroid test, chemistries to check organs and a urine test.



Many of the common conditions will show up with these tests. If the initial tests don't give the answer, x-rays or specialized tests are needed.

Once you know the cause, then it can be treated properly. Some of these diseases can only be controlled and not "cured". Medications, supplements, and special diets can often improve your pet's weight and slow down the progression of the disease.

Summary

If you notice your pet losing weight, but he seems fine otherwise, consider some of the "normal" reasons for weight loss. Sometimes all you need to do is give your pet more food or more frequent meals to improve the situation. Some older pets don't eat much at one time, so you need to increase the number of feedings.

Since weight loss can be the sign of a serious condition don't wait too long to have your pet examined. Some pets will still act normal when they have an underlying disease. If you don't find an obvious reason for your pet to have lost weight, have an exam and tests done right away. The sooner you find out the cause and treat it, the more likely you will have a successful outcome.