



## Fat Dogs

by: *Monica La Polt*

**Q**uick - how much do you weigh? I thought you would know. Now, how about your Springer? Do you know how much your dog weighs? I didn't think so. Okay, here's a quick test. Is your dog fat? Don't know? Aren't sure? Here's a short test. Have your dog stand up. Look down directly over your dog. Can you see his waist? Every dog should have a slight indentation at the area where his rib cage ends and before his hips begin. Does your dog? Next step. Reach down and touch your dog's rib cage, press ever so slightly. Can you feel his ribs? Not count them, just feel them. Touch his shoulders, can you feel the shoulder blade? If you answer no or don't know or not sure to any of these, your dog is fat.

Just like with humans, obesity is dangerous to your dog. It shortens his lifespan, makes him more prone to heart disease, digestive problems, arthritis and hip dysplasia, to name a few. Obesity is known to cause liver disease, hypertension, constipation, heat intolerance, and increased risk under anesthesia. Overweight dogs can have problems breathing. As well, his quality of life will be diminished due to an inability to run or play.

Nothing disturbs me more than to see a MAESSR rescue dog who has been permitted to become grossly obese. Springers are bred to be active, energetic dogs who can spend a day in the woods with their owners without tiring. The dogs I see would be lucky to survive an hour walk with their owners.

What to do? The answer is as simple as you would expect, reduce calories and increase exercise. I can hear your

response, but Buddy or Molly get so hungry. They look at me with those eyes. How can I put him on a diet when they already act as if they are living on the brink of starvation? I have a simple answer. Do you love your dog? Do you want them to have a long healthy happy life? Then put them on a diet.

Before starting on any weight reduction plan, see your veterinarian first. Discuss optimum weights for your dog's size and any health issues that your dog might have that should be considered before changing his diet or increasing his exercise.

How to do it? First, if you free feed your dog, leaving a bowl of food down all day, stop. The majority of dogs will over feed and carry extra weight as a result. Put him on a schedule of two meals a day.

The good news is that you don't need to starve your dogs in order to get them into shape. Start by reducing the amount of dog food you feed your dog. I prefer not to use diet foods because I find that the dog's coat deteriorates, becoming dry and flaky. While I do not suggest using diet foods, you should know how much fat is in your dog's food. The optimum range is between 12 and 16 per cent.

I reduce kibble intake by a third. In place of the kibble, I give vegetables such as frozen green beans, canned pumpkin (not pie mix, but canned pumpkin) or carrots. I suggest against feeding broccoli, as some unpleasant flatulence can result. If you have reduced your food by 1/2 cup, then give your dog 1 cup of a vegetable substi-

tute. Most dogs love these items and will think that they are getting a treat in the dinner.

What about treats? Springers love treats and we love giving treats to them. Treats themselves are not bad. It is an overabundance or type of treats that is the problem. If you are training your dog or generally like to give them cookies, then you need to reduce the amount of kibble they get. Or you can give your dog carrots as treats instead of high fat doggy goodies.

The other step is exercise. Commit to taking your dog for a long walk two to three times a week. Take them to a doggie park where he can play with other dogs. Go to an obedience or agility class. Dogs, like people, are lazy. They will not self-exercise in the backyard. You need to get out there with them and throw the ball or race around the yard or something! The nice benefit is that exercising with your dog is good for you too!



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