

2.7 Million Pet Owners Are Told Their Pets Are Overweight In The Last Year

- In the last 12 months, 1.7 million dog owners and one million cat owners have been told by a vet their pets are overweight
- Vets suggest that the top misconceptions held by pet owners about the weight of their pets are that overfeeding or giving treats is a way of showing love to pets (54 per cent)
- Vets report having to seek medical treatment for injuries caused by lifting heavy animals

New research from Direct Line Pet Insurance¹ reveals pet obesity is on the rise across the UK. In the last 12 months alone, 2.7 million pet owners have been told their dogs (1.7 million) or cats (1 million) are overweight. This is one in eight (12 per cent) dog owners, a rise on the eight per cent who were told their dogs were overweight over the two years previously, highlighting it is a growing issue.

Research conducted amongst vets², in the last year, reveals that the vast majority (83 per cent) are seeing an increase in the proportion of overweight pets being brought into their practice for treatment. Vets estimate that they are treating 49 per cent more overweight pets than they were just a year ago. In fact, it is estimated that a vet will treat six animals showing signs of obesity during an average week.

Not only is the pet's health at risk if it is overweight, owners themselves are at increased risk of injury when lifting overweight animals. In just the last year dog owners have sustained several different types of injuries as a result of their pets, some of which are relatively minor, like bruising (two million dog owners) and muscle strain (1.2 million owners) but others are much more serious. Dog owners have reported suffering major injuries including broken bones and spinal injuries as a result of carrying their pet.

The increase in overweight pets mean vets are at a greater risk of injury when treating patients and over half (54 per cent) of vets are regularly concerned about injuring themselves when treating heavier animals. Nearly two thirds of vets who have sustained an injury when treating an overweight animal have had to see the doctor (63 per cent) and two fifths (41 per cent) have needed to go to hospital. The rise in obesity has also meant that veterinary practices are needing to invest in additional lifting equipment, according to 42 per cent of those surveyed.

Eva Sandstra-Bennett, Head of Pet Insurance at Direct Line, said: "It is alarming that pet obesity is increasing. Dogs and cats being overweight is a very serious issue as it can affect joints, cause diabetes, heart and breathing problems. While it may be horrible to hear from a vet that a pet is overweight, owners should pay attention to their warning, as addressing the problem quickly will reduce risk of future health problems such as diabetes. Measuring out food can help avoid over feeding and while those puppy dog eyes may be hard to resist for scraps and treats, giving in may do more harm than good."

Vets believe that owners are often unaware about the health issues associated with the weight of their pets. The most common weight-related misconceptions owners have around their pets are that overfeeding or giving treats is a way of showing love (54 per cent), that vets are being overly cautious when it comes to pets' weights (50 per cent) and that you can feed your pet more as long as it's high quality food (47 per cent). Vets say almost a third (30 per cent) of owners believe that obesity isn't a serious issue in animals, while 16 per cent of owners are also thought to not believe that animals are able to become medically obese.

Breed analysis

Pug owners are most likely to be told they have an overweight pet, with 75 per cent informed that their pet is too heavy by a vet in the last three years. This was closely followed by Boxer owners, of which nearly 67 per cent have been told their dog is overweight and Golden Retrievers (45 per cent)

Table one: Number of overweight dogs broken down by breed

Dog Breed Category	Proportion of owners with overweight dogs	Number of overweight dogs
Pug	75%	305,226
Boxer	67%	319,767
Goldon Retriever	45%	339,904
Spaniel Breeds (Cocker, Springer, Cavalier King Charles etc.)	40%	600,969
Staffordshire Bull terrier	40%	447,289
Labrador	36%	784,812
Poodle or Poodle-cross (Labradoodle, Cockapoo, Goldendoodle)	31%	155,530
Other Terrier (Jack Russell, West Hihghland, Yorkshrie, Border etc.)	25%	287,442

Border Collie	23%	680,957
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Source: Direct Line Pet Insurance 2019

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Notes to Editors

¹ Research conducted by Opinium among a UK nationally representative sample of 2,006 adults between 20th and 23rd August 2019

² Research conducted by Pure Profile among 101 vets between 29th August and 3rd September 2019

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Direct Line

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