

## Swiss Run Greater Swiss Mountain Dogs

### IS MY DOG TOO HEAVY?

Dogs love to eat. About 40% of America's pet population is over weight. As your loyal friend gains weight and appears fat and happy his inside are starting to feel the effects of the extra weight. Soon he will start to become less active and sleep more. As middle ages comes around he will start to develop lameness problems and getting around will become very difficult. There will also be a greater likelihood of diabetes, reparatory problems, heart trouble, and other issues. A lean dog is a dog that can age with grace and will enjoy running well into his geriatric years. Although the "lean and lively" approach may be better for your pet, it is harder on the owner. The owner needs to make sure there are two measured feedings a day and very little extra beyond the regular dog food.

If your dog is overweight it is taking in more calories per day than it needs. To you the owner, your dog may look great, but it doesn't mean he is not carrying extra weight. You'd be surprised how much bulk can go unnoticed when spread out over a big-bodied or large-boned, or hairy dog. Knowing your ideal weight for your dog can be hard to determine. Going off breed standard is one way, but you have to take into consideration the different sexes, body builds, heights, etc. This can be hard to guess your dog's ideal weight because your breed standard may say 110 pounds, but your dog is ideal at 90 pounds. Just because it says they could get to 110 pounds doesn't always mean they should be that weight. One misconception is spaying and neutering causes animals to get fat. This is untrue. Neutering can cause the metabolism to slow a small amount, as will normal aging, and it will burn calories slower; therefore it may require less food. The surgery does not cause the weight gain, eating too much does and you have control over that.

Exactly how would I know my dog is overweight? When feeling your dogs ribs there should be a thin layer of fatty tissue covering them. There should be enough to keep the ribs plainly visible, but not so much that it submerges them completely. Try pressing gently on the skin over the ribs; if your dog has the proper amount of fatty tissue, you should be able to feel the ribs without effort. If you have to press hard to feel anything and especially if you are able to fold more than 1/2 inch of the skin over his ribs then your dog is probably overweight. If his body appears square-shaped, with no waistline definition or "hour-glass figure" between the ribs and hindquarters he is probably crossing the line into obesity.

What is wrong with a little extra fat? Overweight dogs are prone to increase health problems including:

- Heart, respiratory, and digestive impairment
- Slower healing process
- Poor resistance to viral and bacterial infections
- Aggravated orthopedic conditions
- Skin irritations and disease caused by friction within fatty rolls of skin

Let's explore four typical settings that we encounter with overweight pets. See if any of these sounds familiar.

**Type 1- THE NIBBLER:** "She nibbles throughout the day and doesn't eat much" This pet has a full bowl of food out throughout the day and eats whenever they are hungry. Because the bowl is so full it looks like the dog is barely eating, so scraps from dinner will go into the bowl. Eventually the dog eats most of the meal. Then the bowl gets filled again. The Nibbler's total calorie intake is excessive and it gains weight.

**Type 2- THE BEGGER:** The dog will not do anything without a treat. What has happened is the pet has discovered that the more noise and fussing it produces the more likely it is to be rewarded for this behavior. The owner finally "gives in" to keep the pet quiet and the pet sees

the food as a reward. In effect the owner is training “The Beggar” by rewarding its behavior. It turns into a fun game but the pet’s health may suffer if obesity is the result.

**Type 3- THE GOOD DOG:** She is such a good dog we don’t want her to go hungry. This pet becomes overweight because the owner’s signal of affection for their pet has become focused on feeding. Usually each family member is sneaking a treat to the dog and before you know it they have had a lot of treats throughout the day. The owners love the pet to death. It is a case of too much of a good thing. The owners’ method of showing affection should be directed more toward physical activity than feeding. Think, “FETCH” not “FOOD”!

**Type 4- THE GOURMET DOG:** She just refuses to eat certain foods. The pet has trained its owner to feed it such things as chicken, liver, ice cream, cookies, etc. Although most table scraps are just fine to feed, this pet has been given a choice of what it wants to eat and has chosen certain people food over its dog food. If a child is given a choice it would probably choose cake and candy over vegetables, and its health would suffer. This Gourmet dog usually overeats because it isn’t getting a proper balance of nutrients, plus everything tastes so good there is a reward factor in eating. The solution is ... you choose the meals, not your pet.

Now that we know your pet is overweight we need to rule out if it is from over feeding, lack of exercise, or a metabolic condition called hypothyroidism. Hypothyroidism is a common disease and should be ruled out first before starting a diet with your pet. If your pet is hypothyroid it can be very difficult to shed pounds without proper treatment first. Once we have ruled out any disorders it is time to get down to the diet. Your pet should be put on a high quality, complete and balanced dog food. The food should be a good protein where meat is the first ingredient not corn or any by-product meals. If your dog needs to lose a lot of weight a low fat diet would not be the right choice. These diets have very restricted fat levels to reduce the calories, but have increased the carbohydrate percentages. This increase carbohydrate stimulates additional insulin secretion that tells the body to store unused calories as fat. Therefore your pet may GAIN weight on a low fat food! Innova, Eagle, and Healthwise are good choices for foods. You may also want to supplement with a fatty acid product such as Omega 3, 6,9 or Fish oils. This can help with the joints, hair coat, and digestion while on a diet. Before starting your dog on a diet get a starting weight so you can track the progress of weight loss. You will want to have your veterinarian do a weight loss calculation for your pet with the new or old food. This will let you know how many calories your pet should eat in one day. You should check your pet’s weight every two weeks to make sure they are going down in weight and your diet is working. Keep in mind a healthy dog can abstain from food for five days before any noticeable health effects occur. Very small breeds are an exception talk to your veterinarian for further details. Make sure to always have out fresh water.

The last important detail for a successful diet is exercise. Make sure this is done slowly if your dog is not used to long walks. Go for a leisure walk everyday for 20 minutes during the coolest part of the day. Gradually, you can increase the speed and distance of your walk. Some other great exercises is having your dog come, sit, and stay this program could have double benefits. Your dog could end up not only in better shape, but better behaved as well. Having him sit, get up, and sit again is an equivalent to doing sit-ups. Just remember that whatever activity you do together, the goal isn’t to see how fast, far, or hard you can make your dog work or play. It is to give your dog a reasonable amount of activity.

To successfully help your pet stick to its diet make sure the whole household follows the strict feeding plan and exercise schedule. With patience and total commitment you should see significant weight loss within 4-8 weeks. Good luck and have fun with your dog!

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