

Fit not fat

Although your cat may appear happiest when curled up on the sofa, Nicole Paley of the PFMA explains why it's important that this cushion-like state is not accepted as the norm all day long!

Cats can happily spend up to 16 hours a day sleeping, but with obesity levels in pets having reached 40 per cent, it's clear that we need to counterbalance this down time with increased exercise – in addition to a diet check.

Cat check

First things first... you need to review your cat's shape. Easier said than done, I hear you say! When you're used to stroking your cat on a regular basis, it's really tricky to know whether he's out of shape. So, we suggest you print off the user-friendly cat size-o-meter at www.pfma.org.uk/cat-size-o-meter (a kind of body condition score chart used by vets). This document has handy illustrations to help you match your cat's shape and will flag up any problems.

In summary, if you run your fingers along the side of your cat you should only be able to feel a thin layer of fat covering the ribs. You should also be able to feel an indentation at the waist. Any rounding here then your cat is likely to be overweight. If you find it hard to tell, then check with your vet or vet nurse.

Portion control

Our research has shown that 72 per cent of vets consider one of the root causes of weight gain to be owners not following feeding guides. Every pet food packet has a feeding guideline which advises how much to feed based on the size of your cat – remember this is a guide and you'll need to adjust how much you feed depending on a variety of factors including level of activity, age etc. Also, avoid scraps and limit treats.

If you're struggling with this, just contact your vet to make a plan. They are best placed to advise on feeding as recommendations vary for different life stages, general health and lifestyle.

Let's get pets fit!

Insufficient exercise is a root cause of pet obesity and vets say this is particularly evident for cats. The good news is that, luckily, most cats love to play, which makes it easy to incorporate an increased amount of exercise into their daily routine – and even into their feeding regime!

Our top tip is to make your cat work for his food. Just make two simple changes – introduce plastic foraging balls and increase the distance between your cat's water and food bowls. These seemingly small things really do work and help burn calories over time.

Play time

The shops are full of ingenious toys such as catnip mice, exercise balls and bells! Despite the growing choices, many cats are content with a cardboard box and feathers tied onto a stick.

The key to getting your cat excited by play is to turn it into a hunting game. So wriggle a toy mouse under a sofa and make darting movements.



Once you have identified your cat's favourite play thing, we suggest you hide it away for a few days. You will then find that your cat's penchant for play is intensified when this toy is revealed.

Guidelines suggest approximately 40 minutes of daily play for a cat, and play time should be introduced in short and regular bursts. However, the quantity of exercise your cat needs will vary with age and existing health conditions, while breed has an impact too. For example, some pedigrees, like the Siamese, are extremely active. Again, do check with your vet for bespoke advice.

Tips for indoor cats

Indoor cats will certainly need a more creative approach and an increased amount of play time.

Although it's impossible to replicate the exact experience of outdoor hunting and patrolling, you could introduce your cat to the outdoors on a lead. Although it may take slow gradual training to introduce the cat harness, it is worth introducing small outdoor walks.

If you are away at work and struggle to find time to play, there are some very clever high-tech automated toys available in pet shops and online.

Summing up

All cats are different and, like humans, some are naturally more active than others. However, it is not normal to be totally disinterested in play. Inactivity may indicate a medical problem so if you are struggling to engage your cat in play, visit your vet for a check up. ■

For more information from the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association visit www.pfma.org.uk/keeping-your-pet-healthy, or www.facebook.com/GetPetsFit for tips and a supportive community of pet owners.

