

Community-wide health campaign for pets

The Pet Food Manufacturers' Association and local pet care professionals joined forces in May to launch #GetPetsFit – with a mission to achieve happy, healthy pets for all. **Nicole Paley**, of the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, reports

In May, the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (PFMA) and pet care professionals in Teddington came together to launch #GetPetsFit, a pilot initiative to help pet owners achieve a happy, healthy future for their pets.

The pilot aims to draw on local experts to educate pet owners about how to keep their pets in shape – including the need for exercise, weight management, and correct feeding routines – and recruit local pets to participate in a fun fitness mission running from May until December.

Zara Boland BVSc BE MRCVS, founder of VetVoice Ltd, says: "I am delighted to be working with the PFMA to help the community of Teddington take action and improve the well-being of its pets. By working together, pet care professionals and pet owners can easily boost pets' fitness – and have a great time in the process!"

"The aim is to show pet owners that fitness can be fun"

WEIGH-IN RELAUNCH

The launch of #GetPetsFit ties in with the re-launch of the Weigh in Wednesday initiative – encouraging pet owners to be more aware of ideal weight – and follows the release of a report by the



PFMA in March, which found that three in four vets (77%) believe pet obesity is on the rise. The report also revealed that while the vast majority (93%) of pet owners would be concerned to discover their pet was overweight, only one in three (37%) knew how to check this. The PFMA is launching #GetPetsFit to help remedy this situation and make it both easy and enjoyable for local pet owners to jump start their pets' health regime.

Michael Bellingham, Chief Executive of the PFMA, says: "It is hugely encouraging to know that by feeding and exercising pets to the optimum level, pet owners can potentially give their pets an extra two years of active life. Through the #GetPetsFit campaign, the PFMA and local pet care professionals want to equip the community with the right tools and guidance to achieve this – and we are

very much looking forward to following the pets on this exciting journey."

The pet fitness mission includes a tailored diet and exercise routine along with a

calendar of activity to ensure pet owners stay on the programme. With monthly weigh-ins, regular agility events and a doggy Olympics planned for September, the

aim is to show pet owners that fitness can be fun.

Michael Bellingham explains how the Teddington case study can be rolled out in other communities: "We're working with the local vets, the local pet shop, garden centre and a team of dog walkers and agility organisations. Through working together, we can make a difference. Teddington has been an excellent community to work with and our longer-term aim is for this initiative to be recreated in other parts of the country."

For more information and to keep updated on Teddington developments, visit www.pfma.org.uk and like the campaign Facebook page at www.facebook.com/GetPetsFit

PFMA HOSTS PET OBESITY QUESTION TIME

PFMA brought together guests from the pet care sector to throw the spotlight on pet obesity and to discuss how the sector could work collaboratively for a leaner, healthier future for pets.

Chaired by Mary Sharrock of Purina, the panel included a behaviourist and vet experts from academia, industry, and retail and charity sectors. An audience of almost 100 guests included pet food manufacturers, trade bodies, the veterinary profession, retailers and welfare charities. The focus was on:

- The importance of continued education and ideas for further exploration;
- Tackling the limited understanding of correct portion sizes and making it easier for owners to follow feeding guidelines;
- Promoting healthy body shapes to prevent the shift in the norm towards overweight pets;
- Supporting vet students' understanding of the importance of nutrition and the science behind it so that these messages can be passed on to owners;
- Acknowledging the instinctive need of owners to treat their pets as part of their nurturing behaviour, but urging restraint.

Michael Bellingham said: "The Pet Obesity Time was a great discussion and we now have the real potential to turn ideas in to actions. PFMA will be following up to see where we can take things forward as individual groups within the pet care sector but also in collaboration."