

# 'ENGAGE OWNER EMOTION' TO BEAT NEW OBESITY HIGH

**THE UK pet food industry has warned Britain is facing a pet obesity epidemic, as new figures revealed almost half of all animals taken to the vet are considered overweight.**

The "Pet Obesity: Five Years On" study, carried out by the Pet Food Manufacturers Association (PFMA), found while vets believe up to 45 per cent of the pets they see are overweight, two in three pet owners think their pet is the correct weight.

Based on a survey of 1,000 pet owners, researchers also found more than two-thirds of owners fail to feed their animals correctly in accordance with vets' guidelines.

The report states vets consider the root causes of pet weight gain to be treating with leftover food, insufficient exercise and owners not following feeding guidelines.

To support vets in spreading the word about ideal pet weight, the PFMA will launch its #GetPetsFit campaign this May, which includes the relaunch of the "Weigh-in Wednesday" initiative, designed to encourage pet owners to monitor their pet's body and size regularly.

PFMA chief executive Michael Bellingham urged vets to get involved.

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report by

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tionally, helping them realise feeding and exercising their pet to the optimum level can result in an extra two years of active life," he said.

"The #GetPetsFit campaign will provide the perfect opportunity to do this and we hope, with the help of vets, we can work to resolve this important issue."

The PFMA's research arrives five years after its previous report and states the vast majority of vets believe the issue has got markedly worse since 2009.

## Best intentions

BVA president Robin Hargreaves said he had not seen any obvious improvements in awareness or a reduction in the incidence of obesity.

"It's not surprising to me, as a small animal vet, my colleagues are reporting a deterioration in this area of pet health," he said.

"Owners often ignore our advice on matters of bodyweight for a variety of reasons. Principally, their animals often love food, while owners love making them happy. Even with the best intentions, it's easy to put the diet off or make a token reduction in feeding, but not check if it has been effective.

"I think a habit of monitoring weight, as suggested by the PFMA campaign,

would be a huge step forward. The message needs to be delivered from different sources, emphasising the benefits of optimal bodyweight and making people feel good, rather than mean, when limiting their pet's food for health reasons."

Further findings from the report indicate that while 93 per cent of pet owners say they would be deeply concerned to discover their animal was overweight, only 37 per cent are aware of the simple techniques to check this.

Vets4Life founder Ian Stroud said he believes there are a few basic things that can be done in practice to help educate owners in a positive way.

"All pets should be weighed at every visit and this weight should be recorded, as should a body condition score (BCS)," he said.

"Very often, just giving this will make owners aware of potential issues at an early stage and allow them to modify exercise and feeding behaviour before there are serious changes. It would be lovely if the practice management systems had an area to record the BCS next to the weight on the animal's record card to encourage this behaviour.

"Also, a discussion on nutrition with special reference to obesity should form part of the health exam each year. The initial puppy and kitten exams are a great time to start getting this information across to owners, as it is also when the initial feeding patterns are established."

Vets interested in the #GetPetsFit campaign can visit [www.pfma.org.uk/weighinwednesday](http://www.pfma.org.uk/weighinwednesday)