



Exercise for house-bound pets

It's a shocking statistic: over 100,000,000 American pets are very overweight or obese, up 25% in just seven years. 60% of all American pet cats and 56% of dogs are significantly overweight, a condition that negatively impacts both the pet's physical and mental health, and its likelihood to live to old age. Aside from feeding them healthy diets, what can we do to help our pets slim down? Some ideas:



As with humans, diet and exercise are the keys to keeping your cat slim and fit.

Tips for cats: Experts recommend aiming for 3-5 minutes of play three times daily and using a cat's innate desire to hunt, stalk, and pounce to encourage movement. Balls, stuffed mice, feather dancers and laser pointers can help, but it is crucial to rotate toys, storing some way away so that they retain their freshness for your cat. That same old stuffed mouse loses all appeal if it remains in your cat's environment every single day.

You can also make mealtime more fitness-oriented by alternating where you feed, for example, placing food on top of a tall bookcase occasionally to encourage climbing. Finally, enrich your cat's environment with items to inspire your cat to move. Vertical perches and scratching trees are great, but so are the empty boxes they came in. If your cat likes to jump in and out of boxes, try moving a box to different spots throughout your house every few days, including placing it at different levels to encourage climbing.

Tips for dogs: It's no surprise that walking, running and swimming are the best exercises for dogs. "Continuous aerobic activity strengthens the muscles and heart," says Ernie Ward, DVM, founder of the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention. Most dogs need a minimum of 30 minutes a day ([continued, pg. 3](#))