

Pearl is fat. She does not seem to realize it but according to Kay, her caretaker, Pearl has gotten to the point where she can not longer walk up the stairs without her belly dragging against the edge of each stair. Her belly is now developing redness on the skin and there is little hair left in the areas that contact the floor. Granted, Pearl is a Dachshund and even in normal stature, Dachshunds are built low to the ground, but I can assure you they are not designed to brush it as they move along. Kay has tried to reduce Pearl's weight through diet but has been entirely unsuccessful even to the point where Pearl has gained two pounds over the last two months.

Obesity is a huge health problem in our companions. This problem is by no means confined to dogs and cats. I see obesity in birds, reptiles, rabbits, rats, ferrets and the list goes on. One fact is universal with obesity and that is that it is detrimental to overall quality and quantity of life.

I suspect virtually all of you are aware of at least some of the health concerns associated with obesity in humans. Feel free to extrapolate those concerns to our companions faced with the same problem. Obesity can cause heart problems, liver disease, musculoskeletal disease or at the very least exacerbation of musculoskeletal disease that may have already been present. Arthritis comes to mind. Obese patients are more likely to develop diabetes and the development of certain cancers has been linked to obesity. That is not to mention the deleterious effects obesity has on the quality of life. Simply put, it is better for our companions not to be obese.

Dachshunds such as Pearl have an added risk with obesity. This has to do with their stature. Dachshunds are long backed dogs with a correspondingly long vertebral column slung between two sets of relatively short legs. This can put undue stress on the discs that cushion between the vertebrae. If this stress is severe enough, the disc can herniate, blocking nerve conduction along the spinal cord and paralyze the dog. Obviously, with obesity, this potential disaster is greatly magnified.

Pearl needs to lose weight...desperately. Contrary to what the diet industry would have us believe, there is no great secret to weight loss. It is also true that it does not happen quickly, nor should it! Simply put, weight loss occurs when the number of calories taken in as food is less than is necessary to support a current body weight. Exercise can be a very important part of this weight loss equation as it will increase the calories used by the body and all things left equal, it will accelerate the weight loss process. In Pearl's case, exercise is going to be important, but it must be very controlled due to her extreme condition.

A weight loss program can be initiated with the help of your veterinarian. Calorie needs can be calculated and matched to calorie intake with a planned deficit of calories calculated into the formula to allow for controlled weight loss. It is a very simple process. That said, all companions are not the same. Some have higher metabolic rates. They burn more calories per unit time than do others, so they might tend to lose weight more easily. This does not mean that the lower metabolic rate individuals cannot lose weight. It simply means it might be a slower process.

Obesity is a potentially very serious problem in some of our companions. Since we are the ones that generally do the feeding of our companions, it is up to us to take

charge and work on a weight control program for them. In cases like Pearl, their lives can truly depend on it.