

Text for Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2004

By Nick Horniman

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The majority of us are conscious of our waistline but how many of us keep a check on our pet's weight?

The veterinary nurses at Pets Barn are constantly weight-watching the dogs and cats from the Gloucestershire area. Everyday people take advantage of the free of charge service where pets are weighed.

New research published this week has shown that dogs and cats can live an extra two years longer if they are at the correct weight throughout their lives.

Snoopy is a two year old Jack Russell Terrier. When he first visited the Animal Hospital at Longhope, he weighed in at 9.6kg and the decision was taken for Snoopy to join our Slimmer's Club. Snoopy was a staggering 28% overweight and luckily, her owners were aware of the health problems that can result from Snoopy being obese.

Snoopy, who was a lover of wet food, was also a cunning thief, often getting into the dog food cupboard and managing to get the rubber stopper lid off the treat jar!

His owners followed Pets Barn's advice and put Snoopy on a strict diet. He was put on a special prescription diet and her favourite treats were replaced with small pieces of apple and carrot. As part of the slimming programme Snoopy's exercise was increased.

Snoopy had to report to Longhope every month for a weigh-in and the kilos soon started to drop off. In under four months, Snoopy reached her target weight of 7.5kg.

The Owners were delighted with Snoopy's progress. He became much more agile, and seemed much happier in himself. He even got a waist-line.

Toffee Smith, a lively Labrador bounded into Pets Barn Hartpury, with his 12 year old owner Hannah in May 2004. Toffee was particularly noticeable due to his large size - all 45.5kg of him! After a chat with his

doting owner, it was agreed that Toffee should join the Slimmers Club and that there should be a drastic change to his diet and all his treats would need to be replaced with healthier alternatives.

Hannah and her family were very dedicated and determined to help their canine friend. Following our advice, young Hannah built an assault course in the garden for him, to increase his exercise regime and she brought him in every month for a weight check.

In just 16 weeks, Toffee hit his target weight having lost 10.5kg! Many a man would be envious of the fact that his waist reduced from 36 inches to 28 inches!

Many owners do not realise that overweight pets can eventually suffer from a range of conditions including arthritis, heart disease, breathing problems, diabetes mellitus and intolerance to heat.

Pets Barn recommends both the Purina and the Hill's petfood for pets of normal weight and those pets needing to lose the extra weight. There are foods specifically formulated to help with weight loss. On joining the Slimmers Club, owners receive a special booklet to monitor the animal's activities, feeding and subsequent weight loss. Pets are seen at regular intervals and there is even a National Competition for the pets that lose the most weight. Over the last few years, Pets Barn has had pets win this competition at a local level and then go on to the National Finals. The pet can win a selection of pet accessories and fun activities plus a year's free supply of petfood. In addition, owners of the winning pets can win £2000 worth of holiday vouchers!

"If you think your pet needs to lose weight, you should seek veterinary advice", says Julie Powell, veterinary nurse at Longhope. Signs to look out for in overweight pets include stomachs which tend to sag and bulge sideways, difficulty in feeling their ribs and spine, a lack of a waist, reluctance to walk and a shortness of breath", concluded Julie.

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