

Durham vet warns owners against *killing their pets with kindness...*

A Consett vet is urging pet owners to put their animals on diets – and increase their exercise this summer – after it emerged that North East animal lovers are among the worst culprits for creating portly pooches and fat cats.

A PDSA survey revealed that a whopping 28% of pets in the region are now officially overweight and that obesity rates have shot up by 9% in just one year.

Jacqui Molyneux of The Prince Bishop Veterinary Hospital in Leadgate near Consett says that we are a region that literally loves our pets to death by giving them fatty treats and letting them luxuriate all day on the sofa.

She is now offering special doggie ‘weight watchers’ classes combined with a diet supplement to help pets fight the flab.

As well the new classes and weight loss medication, she recommends diet foods as well as hydrotherapy, which offers all round non-weight-bearing exercise so is easier on the joints.

Some experts blame urban living - fast and busy lifestyles with no time to look after pets properly while others point to a lack of education, and awareness of pet obesity amongst owners.

Jacqui explained: “Pets are an important part of the family and we tend to want to give them little treats to make them feel special. What people have got to remember is that giving a biscuit to a small dog or cat is like us eating a whole packet of biscuits in one sitting and that what might seem a nice treat, often has very worrying consequences.”

“Obese dogs often have difficulty with their joints, including arthritis. They are also more likely to have heart problems and trouble breathing. Dogs that are obese get more skin infections than dogs at a normal weight and may have more problems with anaesthesia and surgery as well as increased risk of diabetes.”



Dogs, in particular, are being increasingly brought into the Prince Bishop Veterinary Hospital with conditions resulting from simply being overweight. The hospital has facilities including an underwater treadmill and hydrotherapy pool that help pets lose weight while improving conditions like arthritis.

To help owners find out if their pet is overweight, an 'obesity chart' is available on the practice's web site at www.princebishopvets.co.uk under the links section to www.pet-slimmers.com.

"The approach has a number of different elements, from educating people that they are literally killing their pets with kindness; realising that they need to do something now and taking steps to achieve that goal.

"Exercise is a fantastic way to get some exercise yourself and to help your dog shed pounds. Our hydrotherapy facilities, including a specialist underwater treadmill – which is one of the few vet-run facilities of its kind in the region – can work wonders, particularly for arthritic animals that can't ordinarily walk far," Jacqui explained.

She also recommends specialist diet foods such as those available from Royal Canin – which can be purchased at the practice or from good pet food stores.

For more information about what you can do to help your pet lose weight, or to sign-up your pet for 'weight-watchers' class for dogs, contact the Prince Bishop Veterinary Hospital on 01207 590 340.

PHOTO CAPTION:

Dog1: Owner Gary Dodds with 'Beauty' the overweight Doberman at the practice's hydrotherapy facility.