



CASTLE VETS PETS

Newsletter – July 2023

Tel: 01566 772211 | www.castleveterinarygroup.co.uk



Neutering of Rabbits

Rabbit awareness week took place last month. Following on from this, we would like to focus on the importance of having rabbits neutered.

From a health and a behavioural point of view there are several benefits to neutering your rabbits. If your rabbit is not intended for breeding and you do decide to have them neutered, the risk of unwanted litters is prevented. Diseases linked to reproductive organs are also prevented as a result of neutering. Around 80% of unneutered female rabbits develop cancer of the womb by the age of five. Neutering may also reduce territorial aggression and undesired sexual behaviours in both males and females.

Female rabbits are usually spayed around four to five months old, although males can be castrated as early as 10 to 12 weeks. It is important to be aware that male rabbits can remain fertile for up to six weeks post castration. Please speak with your vet if you are considering neutering your rabbit due to behavioural issues. The vet may wish to rule out any other causes for the behaviour first such as illness or injury. If necessary, they can be referred to a behaviour expert.

Rabbits are social animals who benefit from being kept in friendly pairs or groups. It is considered that the best pair bond for pet rabbits is a neutered male and a neutered female. The likelihood of fighting is reduced and as neither sex can become frustrated by hormones produced by one another,



this may in turn help the female-male bond. Rabbits must have plenty of space, hiding places and enrichment.

Neutered same-sex pairs may sometimes have disagreements but these are much less likely to occur if they are introduced before 12 weeks of age, or are from the same litter.

Let's Talk About Weight

Obesity is the most common form of malnutrition within the companion animal population in the UK. In 2017 the British Veterinary Association surveyed vets and vet nurses to find out more about the prevalence of overweight and obese dogs and cats:

- These vets and nurses estimated that an average of 46% of dogs and 34% of cats seen in their clinics were either overweight or obese
- A third said that they felt the proportion of overweight or obese dogs and cats seen in practice had increased over the previous 2 years
- The majority identified the most common reason for pets being overweight was 'Lack of owner recognition that their pet is overweight'



With these facts in mind it is worrying that when the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (PFMA) commissioned research among 8000 pet-owning households in 2018 they found the following:

- 67% admitted that they were not concerned about pet obesity at all
- 68% thought that their pet was exactly the right size
- 57% had never discussed the weight of their pet with their vet

‘Being overweight can be defined as having a body composition where the levels of body fat exceed those considered optimal for good health. Obesity can be defined as being overweight to the extent that serious effects on the individual’s health and welfare become likely’ Canine and Feline Obesity: A One Health Perspective, Vet Record 2014

The British Veterinary Association advocate the use of a 9-point scale Body Condition Scoring (BCS, see diagrams below) in combination with routine body weight monitoring in order to prevent, identify and manage weight gain and obesity. Dogs and cats are considered obese if they weigh 30% more than their ideal body weight or have BCS 8 or 9. In dogs and cats the following types of diseases and health complications are reported to be associated with obesity:

<u>Dogs</u>	<u>Cats</u>
Joint stress and aggravation of arthritis	
Increase risk of cancer	
Increase risk of heart disease	Increase risk of diabetes
Increase risk of lower urinary tract inflammation and bladder stones	
Increase risk of pancreatitis	Increase risk of non-allergic skin diseases
Increase risk of oral disease	Increase risk of fatty liver disease
Breathing issues and reduce stamina	
Increased risk during anaesthesia	
Issues giving birth	
Increased inflammation and reduced immune function	
Reduced life expectancy	



Body Condition Score



UNDER IDEAL

- 1 Ribs visible on shorthaired cats. No palpable fat. Severe abdominal tuck. Lumbar vertebrae and wings of ilia easily palpated.
- 2 Ribs easily visible on shorthaired cats. Lumbar vertebrae obvious. Pronounced abdominal tuck. No palpable fat.
- 3 Ribs easily palpable with minimal fat covering. Lumbar vertebrae obvious. Obvious waist behind ribs. Minimal abdominal fat.

IDEAL

- 4 Ribs palpable with minimal fat covering. Noticeable waist behind ribs. Slight abdominal tuck. Abdominal fat pad absent.
- 5 Well-proportioned. Observe waist behind ribs. Ribs palpable with slight fat covering. Abdominal fat pad minimal.

OVER IDEAL

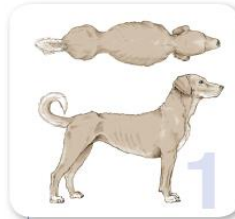
- 6 Ribs palpable with slight excess fat covering. Waist and abdominal fat pad distinguishable but not obvious. Abdominal tuck absent.
- 7 Ribs not easily palpated with moderate fat covering. Waist poorly discernible. Obvious rounding of abdomen. Moderate abdominal fat pad.
- 8 Ribs not palpable with excess fat covering. Waist absent. Obvious rounding of abdomen with prominent abdominal fat pad. Fat deposits present over lumbar area.
- 9 Ribs not palpable under heavy fat cover. Heavy fat deposits over lumbar area, face and limbs. Distention of abdomen with no waist. Extensive abdominal fat deposits.

Bjornvad CR, et al. Evaluation of a nine-point body condition scoring system in physically inactive pet cats. *AVJ* 2011;77:433-437.
Lafamme DP. Development and validation of a body condition score system for cats: A clinical tool. *Feline Pract* 1997;25:13-18.

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Body Condition Score



UNDER IDEAL

- 1 Ribs, lumbar vertebrae, pelvic bones and all bony prominences evident from a distance. No discernible body fat. Obvious loss of muscle mass.
- 2 Ribs, lumbar vertebrae and pelvic bones easily visible. No palpable fat. Some evidence of other bony prominences. Minimal loss of muscle mass.
- 3 Ribs easily palpated and may be visible with no palpable fat. Tops of lumbar vertebrae visible. Pelvic bones becoming prominent. Obvious waist and abdominal tuck.

IDEAL

- 4 Ribs easily palpable, with minimal fat covering. Waist easily noted, viewed from above. Abdominal tuck evident.
- 5 Ribs palpable without excess fat covering. Waist observed behind ribs when viewed from above. Abdomen tucked up when viewed from side.

OVER IDEAL

- 6 Ribs palpable with slight excess fat covering. Waist is discernible viewed from above but is not prominent. Abdominal tuck apparent.
- 7 Ribs palpable with difficulty; heavy fat cover. Noticeable fat deposits over lumbar area and base of tail. Waist absent or barely visible. Abdominal tuck may be present.
- 8 Ribs not palpable under very heavy fat cover, or palpable only with significant pressure. Heavy fat deposits over lumbar area and base of tail. Waist absent. No abdominal tuck. Obvious abdominal distention may be present.
- 9 Massive fat deposits over thorax, spine and base of tail. Waist and abdominal tuck absent. Fat deposits on neck and limbs. Obvious abdominal distention.

Getman A, et al. Comparison of a bioimpedance monitor with dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry for noninvasive estimation of percentage body fat in dogs. *AVJ* 2010;71:383-388.
Jeunesse L, et al. Effect of breed on body composition and comparison between various methods to estimate body composition in dogs. *Res Vet Sci* 2010;88:227-232.
Kobayashi R, et al. Effects of diet restriction on life span and age-related changes in dogs. *JAVMA* 2002;220:1315-1320.
Lafamme DP. Development and validation of a body condition score system for dogs. *Canine Pract* 1997;22:10-15.

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It is clear that obesity is an important thing for us to address in veterinary practice as it has far reaching implications for the health and welfare of our beloved pets but historically it has not always been an easy conversation to have in the consulting room. Alex German, Professor of Small Animal Medicine at the University of Liverpool says:

'Obesity is one of the most common diseases we currently face. It is a major issue, but we DON'T TALK ABOUT IT. It's an uncomfortable topic wrapped in prejudice and blame. In moving forward, we all need to do a better job of holding emphatic, non-stigmatising conversations about obesity, in order to better support owners and support their pets in reaching and maintaining a healthy weight.'

Here at Castle Vets we endeavour to provide a safe and empathetic consulting environment where we hope owners feel able to have positive and constructive discussions about weight management which are free from blame. Our Nurse Weight Clinics are designed to engage, educate and empower owners to tackle the issue of obesity and increased weight in their pets in a safe and sustainable way. Together we can work together to reduce the incidence of pet obesity.



Please contact the practice on 01566 772211 for further information and to book your Nurse Weight Clinic.