

## **IS YOUR DOG OVERWEIGHT?**

Over the years of doing rescue one factor which frequently disturbs me is the quantity of Dobermans who come in overweight. At times there are medical reasons for this condition. The breed is prone to hypothyroidism, but certainly this group is in the minority of dogs with weight problems. Obesity is a major contributor to the development of early arthritis. The whole skeletal system is designed to carry a certain amount of weight, and to overload it results in unusual stress on the dog's joints.

So, how do you know if your dog is overweight? In a very simple test for the Doberman breed, run the fingers of your open hand, using a light touch, over the rib cage of your dog. Can you feel individual ribs, like fingers over a washboard? You should always be able to feel them easily. Now look at him from the side. Can you see individual ribs while he stands there? If you can feel them and also see them, he is underweight. The ideal is to be able to feel them, yet not see them. At this weight, he should have a nice waist.

This test can be applied to any Dobie, regardless of body style. The basis for it is that excess food consumption results in storage of fat cells. The last place for fat to be stored is on the rib cage. If there is fat is being stored on your dog's rib cage, he is overweight. **PERIOD!!**

If you believe your dog may be overweight, begin by making a trip to the Veterinary clinic and weigh him. Then, evaluate your style of feeding, from regular meals, to table scraps, to treats. Include everything that enters your dog's mouth. Contrary to popular belief about low-calorie treats, all treats count toward calorie intake.

Now, get an 8 ounce dry measuring cup and use it to determine how much dog food you are giving. Then add in all the treats and people food you use. When trying to loose weight, reduce the dog's total daily intake by  $\frac{1}{4}$ . Maintain this feeding plan for 30 days and re-weigh your dog. If you have not seen a decrease in this time, reduce the current total by  $\frac{1}{4}$  again, weigh in 30 days. Keep this plan going for at least six months.

If you are not seeing any weight loss after 3 months, it would be appropriate to check in with the Veterinarian, who might want to run a T-4 test to check Thyroid level. It has been my experience that not all Vets are experienced with this breed, and don't have a good sense of appropriate weight. I have talked with adopters whose Vet said the dog's weight was fine, when in fact the dog was at least 25% over ideal weight. I guess they're used to seeing too many of those Labs!

Other tricks on weight control include using raw vegetables like mini carrots or zucchini slices as reward treats. Believe it or not, your dog will relish his own kibble dispensed as a treat. If you are big on treat use, separate out a portion of his daily ration and use that for treat times. Try a verbal reward alternated with a treat reward. Your dog will learn to not expect treats for all requested behaviors. Keep them guessing-it's more fun for them!

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