



**Eat well.**  
**Play more.**  
**Live longer.**

Give your dog all the ingredients  
of a healthy, happy life

**#WeighUp**



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# Let's get started!

Just like people, pets need to eat the right diet and get plenty of exercise to live long, healthy and happy lives. But as many of us know, doing those things isn't always easy!

Every year, we produce our PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report about how healthy and happy the UK's pets really are. Our 2021 Report shows that too many people are still feeding their dogs food that isn't good for them.

9% of dog owners told us they've fed more treats since the start of lockdown and that their pet has gained weight during this period.

Not surprisingly, many vets tell us they now see lots more overweight and obese dogs – even though most owners know that overweight dogs have more health problems, and live shorter lives.

Visit our  
Pet Health Hub  
for expert advice  
on how to care  
for your pet  
[here](#)

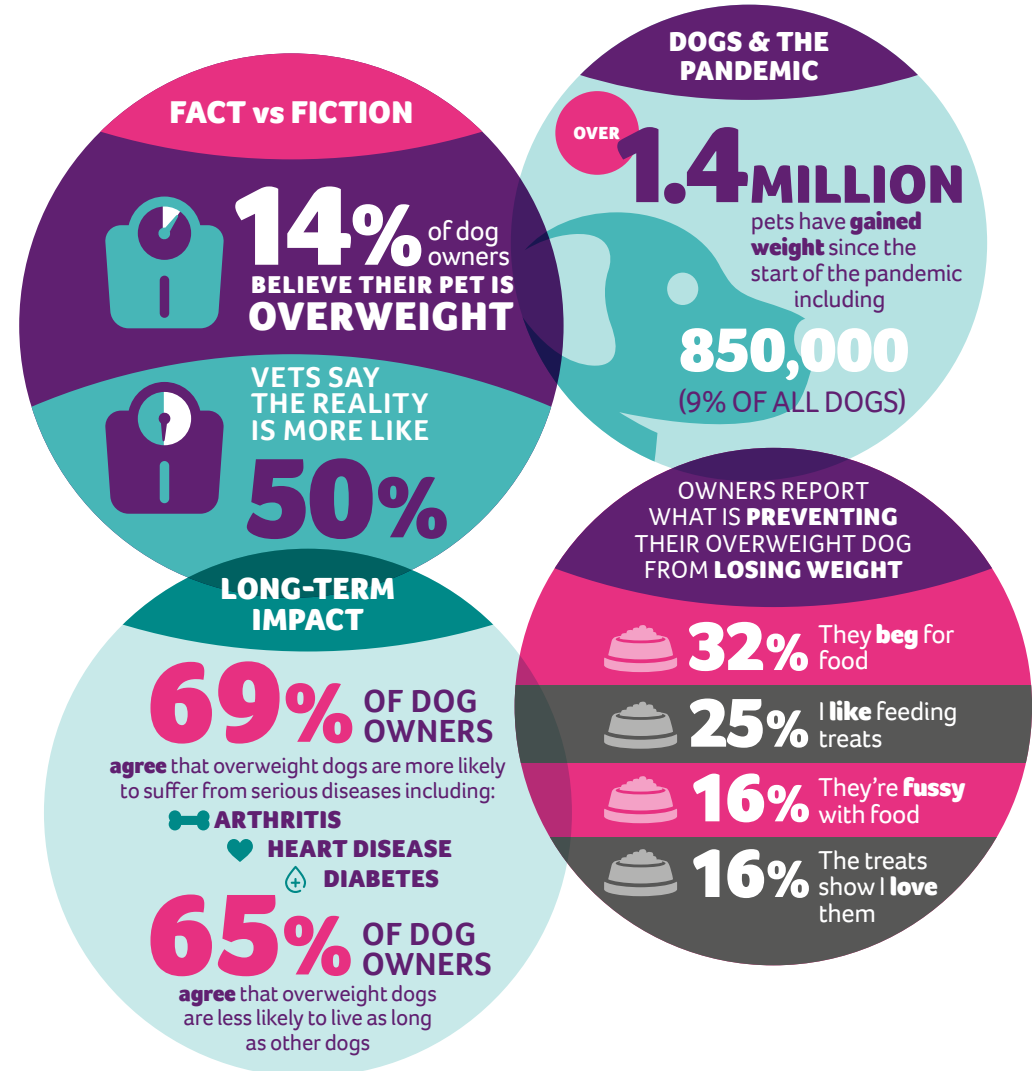


## We can make a difference

By working together we can help to solve the obesity crisis facing the UK's pets.

We've put together this handy guide to help you keep your dog fit, active and the perfect body shape.

And if your dog is not a healthy weight, we've got some tips on how you can help them to get back into shape.



# Is my dog a healthy shape?

## It's easy to check

When it comes to judging if your dog is the right weight, their shape is a better indicator than relying on the scales. That's because the ideal weight is different for every type and breed – but a healthy shape is the same for all dogs.

It's good to get into the habit of checking your dog's shape every few weeks, starting when they're a puppy. That way, you'll know what's normal for your dog – and they'll enjoy the extra attention!

## 'Look & Feel'

Running your hands (and your eyes) over your dog is the best way to check their shape. We've included some pictures to help you decide what Body Condition Score your dog is.

## Living longer: Your dog's shape is important

- A dog with a healthy shape is more likely to enjoy a long and happy life.
- Overweight dogs get old before their time, and you'll have less fun with them.
- Being overweight puts a lot of strain on a dog's body which results in worsening of conditions, such as arthritis or breathing problems.
- Overweight dogs with underlying health conditions can develop symptoms much earlier in life.
- Operations are more risky for dogs that are overweight.



### Feel

Run your hands along your dog's back. You should be able to feel the spine and hipbones quite easily under the skin, but they shouldn't be sticking out.

### Feel

Run your hands over your dog's side. The skin should move freely over the ribs, which ought to be easy to feel.

### Feel

Gently feel the base of your dog's tail where it joins the spine. There shouldn't be any build-up of fat.

### Look

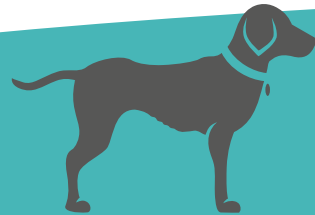
Look at your dog from the side, and from above. You should be able to see a waist; if not, your dog may be a bit overweight.

### Feel

Feel under your dog's tummy. It should go in, not bulge out.

## BODY CONDITION SCORE

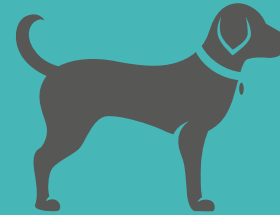
Watch a PDSA Vet show you how to check your dog's shape [here](#)



### UNDERWEIGHT (Body Condition Score 1-3)

Underweight dogs range from 1-3 on the 9-point body condition scale (1 = thinnest, 3 = just under ideal). If your dog is underweight you will notice;

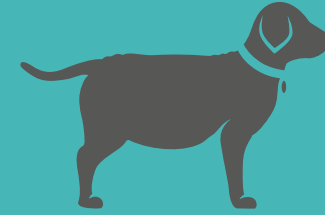
- A very tucked in waist.
- They are visibly bony i.e. you can easily see their hips, ribs, and backbone.
- None, or very little body fat.



### IDEAL WEIGHT (Body Condition Score 4-5)

Dogs are an ideal weight when scored as 4-5 on the 9-point body condition scale. If your dog is an ideal weight you will notice;

- An obvious waist when looking from the side and above - an 'hourglass shape'.
- The ribs and backbone can be felt with a light touch using the flat of your fingers, but you can't see them (except for breeds such as Whippets or Greyhounds).



### OVERWEIGHT (Body Condition Score 6-9)

Overweight dogs range from 6-9 on the 9-point body condition scale (6 = just over ideal, 9 = obese). If your dog is overweight you will notice;

- No visible waist from the side or above.
- The ribs can only be felt if you apply pressure (if they are very overweight you may not be able to feel the ribs at all).
- There may be fat pockets around the neck, shoulders, hips and the base of the tail.



# Eat well...

## Your dog needs the right food to stay healthy and happy.

Dogs come in many shapes and sizes. The type and amount of food they need depends on their breed, age, health and lifestyle. For example, a working Sheepdog needs much more energy than a small dog that doesn't have a working lifestyle. But all dogs need fresh water to drink, at all times.

## What should I feed my dog?

'Lifestage feeding' matches your dog's diet to what is needed at different ages and stages of development. For example, puppies need different food to older dogs, because their bodies are still growing.

Neutering often coincides with the time in your pet's life when their behaviour is calming down following their puppy years and they have passed their rapid growth stage; as such they won't need such a high energy food. It's important to feed your dog the right food for their lifestage, as the food will have been designed to have the correct nutritional requirements for the next stage in your pet's life.

Many companies design food specifically for puppies, juniors, adults and seniors.

Feeding your dog a complete commercial pet food is the easiest way to make sure they get all the nutrients they need.

- You'll find guidelines on how much to feed on the packet.
- You can check you're feeding the right amount by weighing out the food using electronic scales.



## How often should I feed my dog?

Our vets recommend splitting your dog's daily food into two equal-sized meals. This is because:

- Two small meals usually mean fewer treats and titbits than one large meal.
- A shorter time between feeds (12 hours rather than 24) means your dog will be less hungry, has something to look forward to and is less likely to gobble their food too quickly.
- Each meal should be half your dog's daily food amount: feeding twice a day doesn't mean giving twice the amount!
- Dogs often sleep after a meal, which is ideal if you need to leave them at home.
- For some small dogs and puppies, feeding more often – up to four times a day – can help prevent problems like low blood sugar.



## Dogs don't need treats to know you love them

It sounds obvious, but pets that eat too much get fat! If your dog eats a lot of treats, as well as their normal food, those extra calories will turn into fat. The best way to show your love to your dog is by playing and spending time with them as this is what they enjoy most of all. See our Treats section for healthy alternatives [here](#).



## Food scraps

Our vets advise you not to feed leftovers, bits of meat and other scraps, because:

- Human food isn't always good for dogs: some, like chocolate and grapes, are poisonous - [Find out more here](#).
- Dogs that get scraps may refuse to eat their normal food without them.
- It upsets your dog's regular diet and they can soon become overweight.
- Your dog may misbehave during your mealtimes, thinking they're going to get food too!
- Fatty foods contain lots of extra calories and can cause tummy upsets.

## HOW ABOUT BONES?

Our vets recommend that you don't feed bones to your dog because they can get stuck in your dog's throat and splinters can also damage their stomach and intestines.

Feeding your dog...



**A SLICE OF TOAST + BUTTER**



...is like **you** eating **2 PORTIONS OF FRIES**



# If your dog is overweight...



Being overweight can cause your dog a whole host of health problems as it puts pressure and strain on their body.

Overweight dogs with underlying health conditions can develop symptoms much earlier in life, and conditions such as diabetes can be much harder to manage if your dog is carrying extra pounds. Excess fat and weight can also worsen other health problems such as arthritis, cancer and breathing difficulties.

Obese dogs find it harder to exercise and cope with hot weather too.

Generally, dogs put on weight by eating more food than they need. The good news is that in most cases there's lots of ways to make weight loss easier for both you and your dog; with a little bit of knowledge and our help, you'll be able to put a plan in place to help get them into the perfect shape.



*Slow feeder bowls are a great way to stop your dog eating too fast and make them work for their food!*

## What you can do to help



Getting your pet to lose weight might feel daunting but you don't have to do it alone! Start by going to see your vet to check if there's a health problem causing your dog to put on weight. Ask your vet about any pet weight loss clinics they may have available.



Weigh your dog, so you have a 'starting point' for their weight loss programme. Small dogs are easier to weigh at home; first, weigh yourself, then pick up your dog and weigh both of you together. The difference between the two is your dog's weight. If you can't lift your dog safely, your vets will have a set of scales you can use.



Aim for your dog to lose weight gradually: about 1–2% of their starting weight each week is a good target. If your dog is just slightly overweight, feeding a bit less, or changing to a lower-calorie food, may be all that's needed. Dogs that are very overweight or obese may need a special diet, as reducing their food too much can mean they don't get all the nutrients they need. Your vet can advise you on this.

# If your dog is underweight...

You may have noticed a change in your dog's body shape or an unexplained drop in their weight. It's best to seek advice from your vet and get your pet a health check.

If there are no underlying health concerns that could have caused the weight loss, your vet can give you exercise and diet advice to help your pet reach a healthy weight.

## How to maintain your dog at their ideal weight



**Treats** – Just like humans, the occasional treat is fine. But make sure the number of food treats don't start to creep up!



**Play** – Introduce playtime to keep your pet active. It will help improve their physical and mental health, while strengthening your bond with them.



**Diet** – If your dog's at an ideal weight, stick to the same food but continue to keep an eye on their weight so you can amend the amount as necessary.



**Routine** – Feed your dog at the same time – and in the same place – each day, so they get into a good feeding routine.

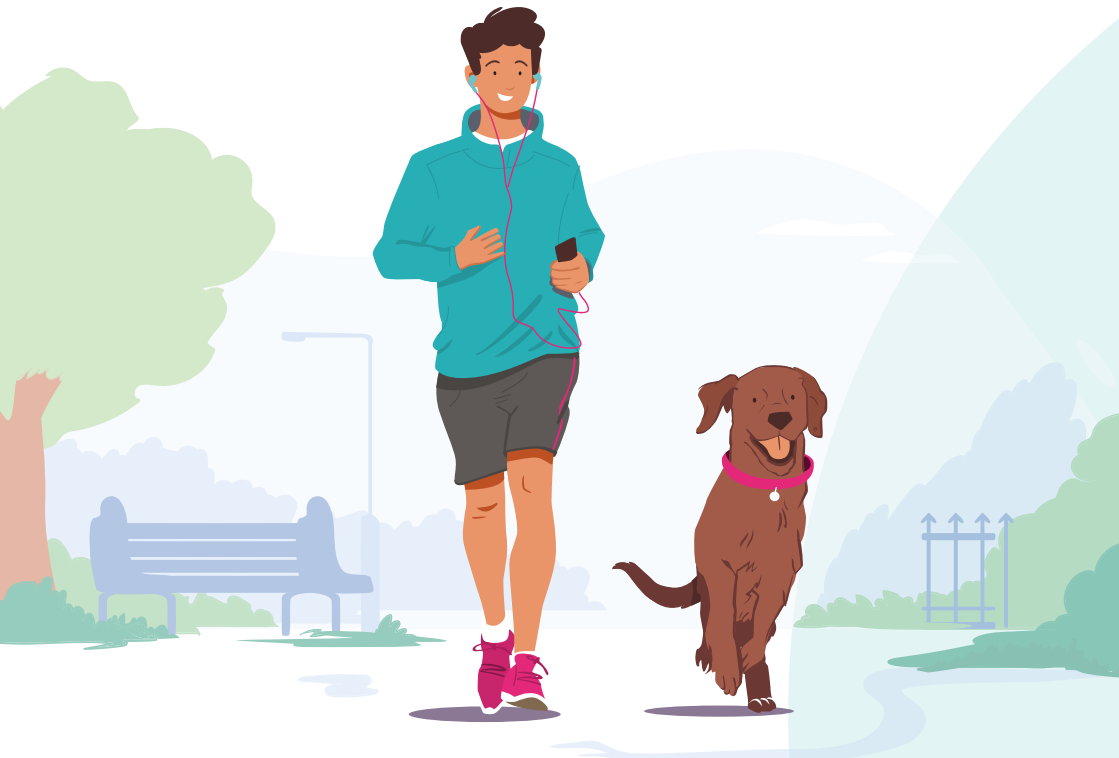


**Exercise** – Go with the exercise regime that suits your dog. If they prefer fewer, lengthy walks instead of shorter, more frequent ones, stick to your pooch's favourite.



Through science and research, Royal Canin has developed food that specifically supports the nutritional management of dogs, including those with specific health problems.

Visit the online [PDSA Pet Store](#) where you can buy Royal Canin food.



## Play more...

**Dogs rely on us to give them the exercise they need to be fit and healthy.**

All dogs need regular exercise, but especially when they're trying to lose weight, because walks and games help burn calories. The best form of exercise for most dogs is walking – which is really good for people, too!

How much exercise your dog needs depends on their type, age and health. For puppies, older dogs, or those with arthritis, for example, several short walks a day are usually better than one long one.

It's important not to make big or sudden changes to your dog's diet or exercise routine. If you have any questions or concerns, your vet will be happy to help.

### As a guide...

*In young puppies, over-exercising can damage joints. As a general guide, try not to walk them for more than 5 minutes at a time for every month of their age.*

## How to make an exercise plan for an overweight dog

How much exercise your dog needs depends on its **breed, age** and initial **fitness level**.



### **Fit, healthy dogs in their prime**

They can usually go further and faster than older dogs.



### **Dogs with short legs**

They need exercise just like long-limbed dogs! Just tailor the walk to suit your dog.



### **Puppies or larger breeds**

Jogging isn't good for them as it can damage their joints.



### **Dogs with short noses**

(e.g. Bulldogs & Boxers) Walking on the lead is perfect as you can walk at a comfortable pace, preventing them from getting too excited so they don't overheat.

### Getting ready



Several short walks are better than one long one – exercise doesn't need to be done all in one go.



It isn't good for dogs to exercise on a full stomach, so wait at least an hour after feeding. They shouldn't eat straight after their walk either. Make sure your dog has water available, but don't let them drink too much in one go.



Allow your dog to have a sniff around before you start – it's important for their mental health. A five-minute warm up and five-minute cool down are also a good idea.

### On the move



Most dogs are happy to go out whatever the weather. Rain and even snow aren't usually a problem – for the dog, anyway! In really hot or humid weather, go out early in the morning or later on in the evening, but stick to a slow pace as they can still be at risk of overheating.



Move at your dog's own pace. If they're still keen to play when you get home, some scent games and puzzles will help use up extra mental and physical energy.



Games with your dog can be played indoors or out, but all dogs should have some daily time outside for their mental as well as physical health.

### Stay on the right track



Check with your vet that your exercise programme is suitable for your dog and remember to keep it varied.



Build up the amount of exercise gradually – trying to rush things may do more harm than good. If your dog's struggling, gets worn out or refuses to go at all, you may need to cut back!



Stick to the programme so that it becomes a daily routine, not just something you do at weekends. This is especially important for older and overweight dogs. If you can't walk them yourself, ask a friend or professional dog walker.

# A guide to your dog's daily exercise programme

All dogs are different and exercise routines need to be tailored to suit. The body of an overweight pet is under physical strain and so exercise needs to be built up slowly. Multiple, shorter walks throughout the day are more effective and rewarding than just one long hike, which can be exhausting and not enjoyable for your dog or you!

## Warming up and cooling down

Just like humans, dogs need to warm up and cool down when they exercise, especially if they're not used to lots of activity. Help your dog ease their body into a new routine – moving gently will help them feel comfortable and mean they're less likely to strain themselves.

### Warm up

- Walk your dog around on a lead in a circle, then go the opposite way, repeating a couple of times.
- Move in a zigzag to get them turning from side to side, being careful that the turns aren't too tight.
- Get your dog to sit and stand a few times, then ask them to 'shake a paw', one and then the other.
- Take them around in a large circle, then go in the opposite direction to finish off.

### Cool down

- At least five minutes before you reach home, slow your pace.
- Let your dog have a good sniff around, stopping and starting as they want to. Their heart rate will steadily go back down to resting level.

### WEEK 1:

Total minutes of daily active exercise = **15 – 30 mins**



#### Session 1 (before breakfast)

5-10 mins walk

#### Session 2 (lunchtime)

5-10 mins walk

#### Session 3 (evening)

5-10 mins walk

### WEEK 2:

Total minutes of daily active exercise = **30 mins**



#### Session 1 (before breakfast)

10 mins gentle walking

#### Session 2 (lunchtime)

10 mins gentle walking

#### Session 3 (evening)

10 mins gentle walking

### WEEK 3:

Total minutes of daily active exercise = **30 mins**



#### Session 1 (before breakfast)

5 mins gentle walking  
+ 5 mins active walking

#### Session 2 (lunchtime)

5 mins gentle walking  
+ 5 mins free playtime

#### Session 3 (evening)

10 mins active walking

### WEEK 4:

Total minutes of daily active exercise = **35 mins**



#### Session 1 (before breakfast)

10 mins active walking

#### Session 2 (lunchtime)

10 mins active walking  
+ 5 mins play fetch  
(or an active walk)

#### Session 3 (evening)

10 mins active walking

### WEEK 5:

Total minutes of daily active exercise = **45 mins**



#### Session 1 (before breakfast)

10 mins active walking  
+ 5 mins free playtime

#### Session 2 (lunchtime)

10 mins active walking  
+ 5 mins free playtime

#### Session 3 (evening)

10 mins active walking  
5 mins free playtime

### WEEK 6:

Total minutes of daily active exercise = **50 mins**



#### Session 1 (before breakfast)

10 mins active walking  
+ 5 mins free playtime

#### Session 2 (lunchtime)

15 mins active walking  
+ 5 mins free playtime

#### Session 3 (evening)

10 mins active walking  
+ 5 mins free playtime

### WEEK 7:

Total minutes of daily active exercise = **55 mins**



#### Session 1 (before breakfast)

15 mins active walking  
+ 5 mins free playtime

#### Session 2 (lunchtime)

10 mins active walking  
+ 5 mins active play (e.g. fetch)

#### Session 3 (evening)

20 mins active walking

### WEEK 8:

Total minutes of daily active exercise = **60 mins**



#### Session 1 (before breakfast)

20 mins active walking

#### Session 2 (lunchtime)

10 mins active walking  
+ 10 mins active play (e.g. fetch)

#### Session 3 (evening)

20 mins active walking



You'll soon see a return on your efforts and have a more active, happier, healthier dog, enjoying life to the full. And you'll probably feel fitter too!

Visit the online [PDSA Pet Store](#) for a range of safe toys ideal for playtime with your dog.



# It's treat time

## Let's keep it healthy!

As owners we want to make our dogs feel special or reward them for doing well and, for many of us, that means a yummy treat. Often that treat is something we also enjoy, so they can share in our delight.

But if you watch closely, your dog will never take time to savour the flavour! So you're feeding that high fat, high sugar biscuit for your satisfaction not theirs. Your dog may act as if they find your treat delicious but it's the smell as much as the taste that will have got their taste buds tingling.

## The best treat is play

Treats don't always have to be food, playtime can also be a great reward. Make sure any food treats you do give don't take up more than 10% of their daily food allowance and ensure you reduce their usual food by 10% so you don't overfeed.

A great tip is to take 10% of your dog's daily food portion and set it aside to be their treat allowance for the day. Keep it in a special box, which will then contain the smell of their treat making it more appealing for them. By keeping the box somewhere special it'll no longer feel like you're offering a boring extra!

If your dog is used to having a treat when you have yours, why not swap it for a healthy alternative, so you don't feel sad by refusing. They still get their treat and you don't feel like you're letting them down.



## Some suitable treats include:



**Chicken breast (skinless)** – Steam cook some fresh chicken breast, chop into small pieces and keep in the fridge until needed. This will be a high reward treat as it smells wonderful for your dog but it's high protein and low fat.



**Frozen broccoli florets** – It's an odd one! But many dogs love frozen pieces of broccoli and this treat doesn't need deducting from your dog's daily food allowance.



**Fruit & veg pieces** – Carrot, apple, pieces of melon are all great treat options, you just need to find the fruit or vegetable that's safe and that your dog enjoys. But remember, carrots and fruit are quite high in sugar so it's wise not to feed too many.



**Remember (most) dogs are much smaller than us, so a 'small' treat can have a huge impact.**

# Stick with the plan

Helping your dog to lose weight may take a bit of time and effort, but it's worth it. Keep at it and your dog can look forward to a longer, healthier and happier life.

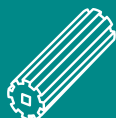
## To do list

- ✓ Write up daily food diary
- ✓ Get batteries for scales (to weigh food)
- ✓ Steam chicken breast, chop, freeze – ready for treats
- ✓ Consider a smaller harness for walks to stay safe, now your dog's exercising more and losing weight
- ✓ Order weight-loss biscuits
- ✓ Buy puzzle feeder to slow meal times down – so feeding time is even more fun!
- ✓ Chop carrot and apple into pieces, ready for trip out tomorrow (so I'm not tempted to feed the wrong stuff)

## Food diary



**Morning:** dried biscuits – only half of weighed out daily allowance



**Mid morning:** low fat dental chew – remember to reduce dinner by 10%



**Time for lunch:** a few pieces of chopped carrot and apple



**Mid-afternoon:** just gone for a walk, so treated us both to some melon pieces. Yummy!



**Dinner time:** The remainder of dried biscuits for dinner – I've remembered to take out 10% of the daily allowance because of the dental chew earlier



## Treat recipes:



### Chicken pup-sicles

Mix chopped, cooked chicken with some pureed carrot and a drop of water. Put the mixture into moulds and pop in the freezer.



### Veg-tastic

Chilled or frozen carrots or broccoli are a cheap and easy treat for dogs who need to watch their weight.



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on looking after  
your pet**

## #WeighUp

Visit our **Pet Health Hub**  
for expert advice on  
how to care for your pet

[www.pdsa.org.uk/weighup-phh](http://www.pdsa.org.uk/weighup-phh)

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SAVING PETS CHANGING LIVES