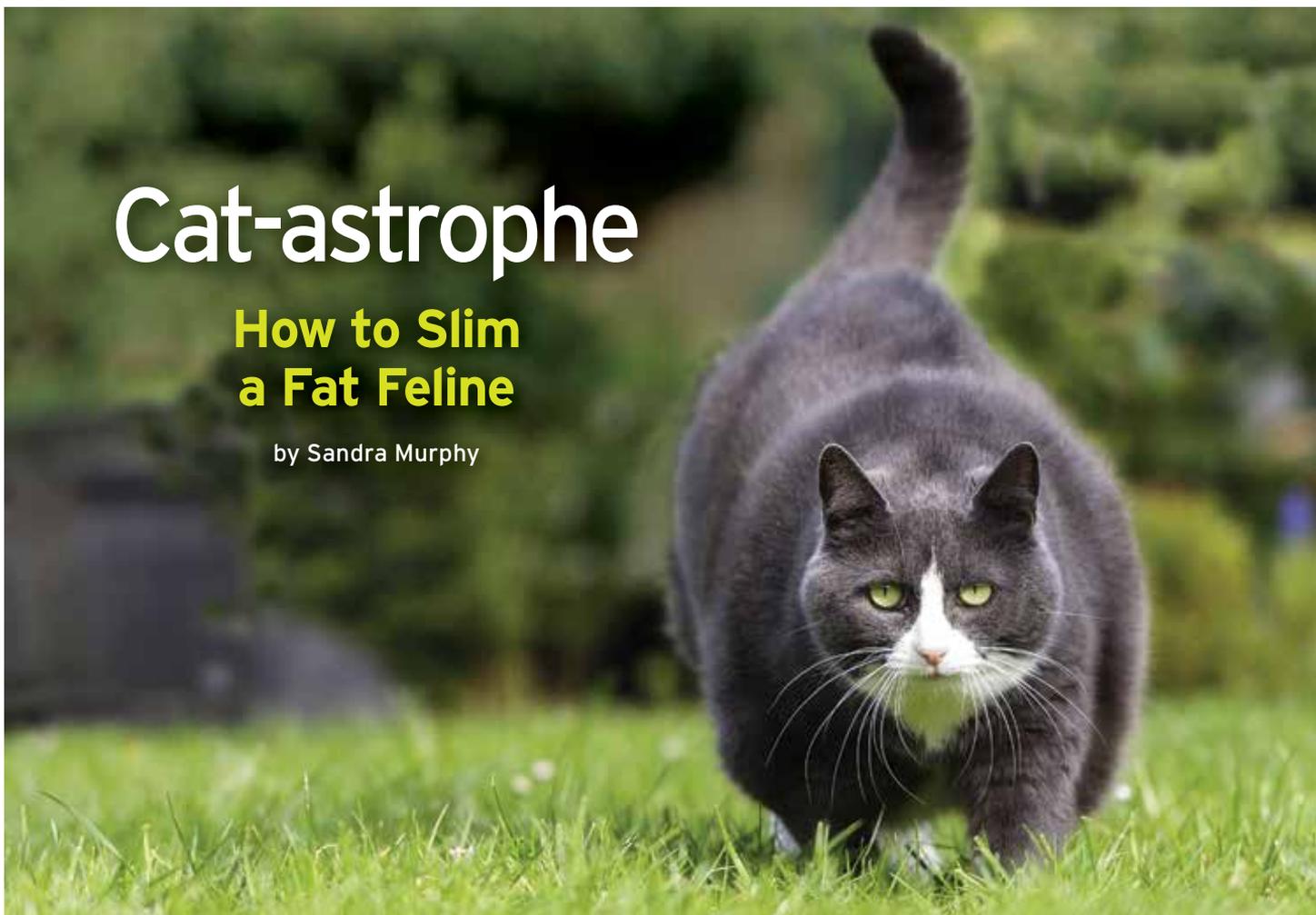


# Cat-astrophe

## How to Slim a Fat Feline

by Sandra Murphy



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**A**lmost 60 percent of America's pet cats are overweight, according to a survey by the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention. Feline obesity can lead to joint pain, hinder self-grooming and make it harder to use the litter box, all resulting in fat cats being left at shelters by frustrated owners.

Chubby kitties also are more prone to osteoarthritis, Type 2 diabetes mellitus, respiratory problems and non-allergic skin conditions. "Potential health problems make overweight cats harder to adopt," says Deanna Schmidt, with the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, in Pittsburgh.

"On Fat Cat Tuesdays, we waive the adoption fee for cats 14 pounds and over. We counsel adoptive families and follow up so that ongoing healthy eating and exercise continues

to melt away the pounds."

Experts advise that a house cat should maintain the sleek, fluid motion of a jungle cat. Viewed from above, healthy cats have a distinct waistline, an inward curve between the rib cage and hips. Pick it up and step on the scale. The pet's weight should comprise between six to 10 pounds of the total.

"The first time I saw healthy cats, I thought they looked small because I'd become used to seeing fat cats," recalls Traci Pichette, founder of Pumeli tea and gift boxes, in St. Petersburg, Florida. She's not alone in her assessment.

### Suggested Solutions

While free-feeding dry food is easier for owners and allows a cat to snack at will, some take advantage and overeat, often from boredom. To help

the transition from always-available dry food to mealtime wet food, use kibble as a special treat.

Food puzzles, widely available online or in pet supply stores, will keep Kitty busy during the day. Homemade feeding puzzles work, too; put a small amount of kibble in a cardboard tube or small box, tape the end shut and randomly cut small holes in the sides. Kitty will have to roll the tube or fit a paw inside to retrieve a treat.

"Free-feeding dry food is comparable to a constant supply of Fritos on our desk," says Jackson Galaxy, author of *Cat Daddy*. "As far as the myth that dry food cleans teeth, I ask, do you floss with Melba toast? Dry food leaves plaque. A grain-free, wet food adds needed moisture and fat to their diet. A cat's teeth are designed to rip and tear, not crunch."

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“Changing my cat’s food to an all-wet diet slimmed her down to a healthy weight. I hated the smell, but it made sense to me that dry food was just carbs,” says Pichette. “At first, she whined at not having food all the time, but got used to it, and now she can eat treats in moderation. The cool thing is we’re all enjoying her increased energy and playfulness.”

Cats are obligate carnivores, which means their natural diet comprises 90 percent meat and 10 percent vegetable matter. A roaming cat’s native routine is to search for food, hunt, catch and eat, groom and nap. Because each catch is small, they eat frequently.

“There’s still an ancestor cat inside domesticated felines, a ‘raw’ cat that

wants to hunt for its food,” explains Galaxy. “We need to play into that thinking and feed at intervals; ideally, every five hours or so, or at least in the morning, after work and about an hour-and-a-half before bedtime.”

While the family’s morning and evening schedules mean just a quick scoop of food in the bowl, the third meal should be an interactive one. “A battery-operated toy or waving a laser light around is not play,” says Galaxy. “Interactive play is not texting with one hand and wiggling the fishing pole toy with the other. You have to get up and move to let the cat search for the toy, watch and wait, then pounce. It engages the animal mentally and physically and brings the raw cat to the surface. When

you reach the point of diminishing returns, the pet is tired and it’s time for a meal.” His foundation improves lives of shelter animals, teaching staff to clicker train, entertain and exercise their cats to make them more adoptable.

After an active day, the cat will be ready for bed, syncing its rhythm with the rest of the household. “A full play session satisfies natural instincts and prevents the cat from hunting your ankles as you sleep,” advises Galaxy. “It’s not a luxury to have a variety of toys; it’s a necessity for having a quality relationship with a healthy cat.”

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