



Body Condition Score Guide

The vet's hands-on 1 to 9 score for dogs and cats, and how to read it

PETSLIKEMINE
WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| PET NAME _____ | TODAY'S DATE _____ | VET PRACTICE _____ |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|

Body condition score (BCS) is how vets judge weight without trusting the scale alone, because frames and breeds vary so much. It is a hands-on score from 1 (emaciated) to 9 (grossly obese), and the target is 4 to 5. Roughly every point above 5 is about 10% over the ideal weight. The eye misleads, especially on your own pet, so go by your hands, not the look.

THE THREE HANDS-ON CHECKS (DO ALL THREE, NOW)

- Ribs: feel along both sides of the chest. At a healthy weight you feel them easily under a thin cover, like the back of your hand, without pressing or digging
- Profile: look from the side. The tummy should tuck up from chest to back legs, not hang level or sag
- Waist: look down from above while your pet stands. You want a gentle tuck-in behind the ribs, narrowing before the hips, not a straight or bulging outline
- A photo, side-on and top-down in good light, framed the same each time, is what you will come back to

WHAT EACH BAND MEANS (WSAVA 1 TO 9)

| SCORE | WHAT YOU FEEL AND SEE | WHAT IT MEANS |
|------------------------|--|--|
| 1 to 3 | Ribs, spine and hips obvious; no fat cover; an exaggerated tuck | Underweight. Losing weight without a deliberate diet is a warning sign, not a win: see the vet |
| 4 to 5 IDEAL | Ribs felt easily with a thin cover; a visible waist from above; a tuck from the side | Healthy weight. This is the target. Aim here and hold it |
| 6 to 7 | Ribs hard to feel under fat; waist absent or barely there; a slight to obvious tummy | Overweight. Common and very treatable. Time to act on portions |
| 8 to 9 | Ribs cannot be felt; no waist; heavy fat over the back, base of tail and tummy | Obese. Worth a vet-guided plan and rechecks; expect a real difference to comfort and movement |

THE CAT CATCH: THE PRIMORDIAL POUCH IS NOT FAT

Many cats, even lean athletic ones, have a loose, low-hanging belly flap that swings as they walk. That is the primordial pouch, normal anatomy, not a sign of being overweight. It is loose and floppy; real fat is a firm, all-over roundness with no findable ribs and no waist. Score a cat from the ribs and the waist, not the belly flap.

UK NOTE: THE 5-POINT SIZE-O-METER

The PDSA / UK Pet Food "Size-O-Meter" you may have seen is a 5-point scale. It maps onto the 9-point one: 1 of 5 is roughly 1 to 2 of 9, 2 of 5 is about 3 of 9, 3 of 5 is the ideal 4 to 5 of 9, 4 of 5 is about 6 to 7 of 9, and 5 of 5 is about 8 to 9 of 9.

OUR PET TODAY

Score it now, then again every few weeks. The change is far easier to see in a photo than in a single number.

| DATE | BCS (1 TO 9) | WEIGHT | PHOTO TAKEN? |
|-------|--------------|--------|--------------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

Written and reviewed by Dr Alastair Greenway-MRCVS and Claire Greenway-BVM&S MRCVS. This sheet explains and records. It does not diagnose or prescribe. Always follow your own vet's instructions.

How to use. Feel the ribs, find the waist, check the profile, and put a number on it: 4 to 5 of 9 is the goal. Log it in the Healthy Weight Tracker and watch the trend. A wellbeing aid, not a substitute for veterinary advice.

SCORE IT 1 TO 9, AIM FOR 4 TO 5