

## MANAGEMENT OF WEIGHT LOSS IN OBESE CLIENT-OWNED DOGS - EVALUATION OF A HIGH PROTEIN DIET

<sup>1</sup>Diez, M., <sup>2</sup>Nguyen, P., <sup>3</sup>Blanckaert, C., <sup>4</sup>Coquet, M., <sup>5</sup>Devois, C., <sup>1</sup>Istasse, L., <sup>5</sup>Biourge V.

1 *Animal Nutrition Unit, University of Liege, Belgium*

2 *National Veterinary School of Nantes, France*

3 *Clinique Vétérinaire du Littoral, Wimereux, France*

4 *Clinique Vétérinaire Jules Verne, Feuquières-en-Vimeu, France*

5 *Royal Canin, Centre de Recherches de Saint-Nolff, Vannes, France*

Obesity has been recognised as the most common form of malnutrition in small animal practices in the Western World (Sloth, 1992). Faced to an obese dog, the practitioner has the choice between several low-energy diets. Higher protein diets have been shown to better maintain muscle mass during weight loss (Hannah, 1999). This paper describes a clinical trial in which a high protein diet has been offered to client-owned dogs starting a weight loss program. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the efficiency of such a diet in field conditions.

From April to June 2000, nine privately owned obese dogs -8 females and 1 male- were recruited in 4 practices to test the efficiency of a high fibre, low carbohydrate and high protein diet (44,1% crude protein, 28,6% total dietary fibre, 8,7% ether extract and 2800 kcal ME/ kg) in the management of canine obesity. The mean age, weight and body condition scores of the dogs were respectively 8 years (range 3-10), 30 kg (13.5-48) and 4.6/5 (4.5-5). In order to exclude all forms of secondary obesity, clinical examination, complete blood count, routine serum biochemistry, urinalysis and evaluation of thyroid and adrenal function were performed in every case. Mean excess body weight was 30 % (11-58). History and clinical examination showed inactivity or lethargy in 5 dogs, impaired breathing in 3 dogs and locomotion problems in 2 dogs but all other parameters were within normal limits. After he had agreed to enter the study, each owner was given sufficient amount of food for a month of test and was asked to weigh his dog weekly at home and to bring him back monthly at the clinic for physical exam, body weight measurement and getting more food. Clinical examination, weight, thoracic and pelvic circumference, fecal score and aspect of the coat were performed or recorded monthly. Owners were also called monthly by an investigator to follow compliance.

Treatment consisted of feeding 40 -55% of maintenance energy requirements for the dog's estimated ideal body weight until it reached optimum body condition. Dogs were fed twice daily and exercise was recommended to minimize loss of muscle mass.

Results. All the dogs completed the whole study. The time necessary to reach the target weight ranged from 4 to 38 weeks (mean : 19). This trial demonstrated a huge disparity in the rate of weight loss : from 0.9 to 3.14 % (mean : 2 %) per week. This variation is explained in part by the intensity of rationing and the degree of owner's compliance with the vet's recommendations. Improvement in body condition score was obvious and owners reported that their pets were much more active and playful.

Conclusion. The high protein experimental diet was successfully tested in field conditions and all dogs reached optimal body condition. Treatment of obesity involves a suitable diet formulation and continual patient monitoring to maintain the owner's enthusiasm and compliance. As weight loss program can be very long, effective client motivation plays a key role in the success of the treatment. Their efforts are rewarded by a more lively and playful pet.

### References

- Hannah S. (1999) *Comp. Cont. Educ. Pract. Vet.* 21(11K), 32-33.  
Sloth, C. (1992) *J. Small Anim. Pract.* 33, 178-182.