

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**ONE-THIRD OF CANADIAN PETS SPEND TOO MUCH TIME ON THE COUCH  
AND NOT ENOUGH TIME OUTDOORS**

***-It's time for four-legged pals to shape up and trim down with The Pet Fitness Challenge-***

**Toronto, ON** – The numbers are in and they don't lie! One in four Canadian pets are obese and very little is being done to combat this problem<sup>1</sup>. Obesity has become a major public health problem in Canada and while we are continually reminded about the importance of maintaining our own health and well-being, we often forget it is just as important for our four-legged friends. *The Pet Fitness Challenge*, a joint venture between the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) and Hill's Pet Nutrition Canada, is an attempt to educate and encourage pet owners to participate in the prevention of pet obesity.

“Like adults, obesity is a growing concern for Canadian pets and can be attributed to a sedentary, couch potato-like lifestyle and improper attention to food choice and exercise,” says Dr. Patricia Stapley Chase, Canadian Veterinary Medical Association. “We recognize the importance of an active, healthy life for companion animals across the country and are committed to programs like *The Pet Fitness Challenge*.”

The recommended amount of physical activity for a pet to maintain a healthy weight is 15 to 20 minutes at least three times daily for dogs and two times daily for cats. But an astounding number of Canadian pets are not getting the exercise they need.

A recent survey conducted on behalf of Hill's Pet Nutrition Canada reveals that one-third of Canadians do not even walk their dog once a day, while 41 per cent of cats get only fifteen minutes of exercise each day. And, with only 50 per cent of Canadian pet owners following the recommended amount of exercise, it's no wonder pet obesity is on the rise.

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*The Real Skinny on Pet Obesity*

Almost 40 per cent of Canadians are unaware of what their pet's ideal weight should be. Of this group, one in four pet owners actually has an obese pet. Since a pet's quality and length of life is affected by its overall weight, it is crucial that pet owners know their pet's current and ideal weight.

A dog or cat is defined as obese when their body weight exceeds the ideal range by 20 per cent or more. But what does this mean in dog or cat terms? Four pounds of fat on a 20-pound dog or two pounds of fat on a 10-pound cat is equal to an additional 30 pounds of fat on a 150-pound human. That's a lot of extra weight! With extra pounds come problems that may contribute to poor health and distress for animals, such as a lower resistance to infection, increased incidence of arthritis, diabetes, gastrointestinal problems, high blood pressure and cancer.

"The important task of weight loss and maintenance lays in the hands of the pet owner," says Dr. George Guernsey, senior advisor of veterinary affairs for Hills Pet Nutrition Inc., and past president of the CVMA and BCVMA. "However, the first step to determining a pet's ideal weight and developing a strategic weight-loss plan begins at the veterinary office. It is imperative that pet owners talk with their veterinarians about their pet's weight at each check-up because the best way to reduce, and then control the weight, is through a structured fitness and nutritional plan."

*The Keys to Healthy Weight Loss*

Dogs and cats need daily exercise to ward off excess weight that may result from factors such as over-eating, a sedentary lifestyle, their age, breed, existing health conditions and more. Similar to humans, to ensure optimal health, calorie intake should balance with energy usage. And for overweight or obese pets, it is crucial that they eat well-balanced meals designed to meet nutritional needs, while minimizing excess calories.

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Forty-seven per cent of Canadian pet owners are unaware of how much they feed their animals and never follow the recommended serving listed on the bag or can. In addition to food choices, one-third of pet owners do not pay attention to the number of snacks their pet receives a day. To help a pet lose weight and improve overall health, further attention must be paid to both the quantity of food fed, including treats and snacks, as well as the type of food fed.

Pet owners with overweight or obese pets should feed their cat or dog a food that is specifically formulated for weight loss or weight control. When looking for the appropriate food, be sure to research the nutritional contents – not all pet foods that claim to be designed for weight loss or weight control are equal. Weight related foods should have less fat and calories than regular pet food, and preferably, enriched with L-Carnitine to build lean muscle, helping turn fat into energy. In addition, a “true” *light* pet food should meet the “light labelling standards” outlined by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO). Dry foods must not exceed 3,100 kcal (canine formulas) and 3,250 kcal (feline formulas) per kilogram of food while canned foods must not exceed 900 kcal (canine formulas) and 950 kcal (feline formulas) per kilogram of food. Hill’s Pet Nutrition, a global leader in pet nutrition, offers excellent weight management canned and kibble formulas for both dogs and cats, while meeting AAFCO labelling standards.

*Get Moving and Get Active*

Balancing the right diet with regular exercise is key to balancing a pet’s life.

*The Pet Fitness Challenge* presents an opportunity for pet owners and their pets to get active together and change their lives for the better. A recent study conducted by Chicago’s Northwestern Memorial Hospital and Hill’s Pet Nutrition (*PPET - People and Pets Exercising Together*), found that by eating healthy and getting active together, pets and their owners are more likely stay on a weight loss program. From discovering that perfect trail to explore with the dog, to increasing the games played with the cat, daily activity will improve the health of any overweight pet immediately and will assist pet owners in their quest for fitness as well!

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The summer of 2005 is the time to get started and get moving. Participate in *The Pet Fitness Challenge* and see what a difference it makes.

The survey was conducted by Decima teleVox and sponsored by Hill's Pet Nutrition, Inc. and is based on a total of 1,025 respondents across Canada, aged 18 and older, between March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005 and April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005. The results have a margin of error of +/- 3.1 per cent.

Hill's Pet Nutrition, Inc. is a leading global pet food company that manufactures and markets premium wellness and therapeutic pet foods under the Hill's® Science Diet® and Hill's® Prescription Diet® brands. Hill's mission is to help enrich and lengthen the special relationships between people and their pets by producing the most advanced, highest quality pet foods available. In Canada, Hill's markets Science Diet® brand pet foods through veterinarians and pet specialty food stores, and Prescription Diet® brand pet foods exclusively through veterinary clinics.

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) is the national professional association representing the interests of over 9,000 veterinarians in Canada. The Association is committed to excellence within the veterinary profession and to the well-being of animals. To aid in the promotion of animal health and responsible animal ownership, the CVMA developed a comprehensive Web site for animal owners, [www.animalhealthcare.ca](http://www.animalhealthcare.ca).

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Veterinary Medical Association