For Active Dogs!

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Coaching dog enthusiasts to embrace the unique needs of active dogs through teaching, mentoring and educational media

No Weigh!

It is important to maintain your active dog at a correct weight. **People** who are overweight have an **increased risk of cancer** and **other systemic diseases** as well as **early death**, though the evidence basis in dogs is not quite as rigorous (1-4). Keeping a dog in optimal to slightly lean body condition has been shown to **decrease the risk of osteoarthritis** (5).

Sandy Stokes

Some people the Purina Body Condition Score, a 9-point scale that uses a visual and descriptive assessment of the dog, to evaluate their dog's weight. There are **several problems with body condition scoring:**
1. It might apply to a short-coated, average-structured dog, but what about dogs with big barrel chests and heavy, wavy or sculpted coats, such as the Bernese Mountain Dog or the Portuguese Water Dog?
2. When it says for a score of 5: "ribs palpable without excess fat covering," how do we know what is excess?
3. Purina's own study showed that a dog with a BCS of 5 out of 9 could have a percent body fat between 13 and 22%. That range is so broad that **we don't feel that the BCS method is specific enough** to help keep our dogs at a healthy weight.

There's a better way! Just feel the thickness of your dog's subcutaneous fat using the **Tissue Tent Test**. This is easily done in the area of the last 3 to 4 ribs, about 1/3 of the way down from the topline (**Figure 1**). In that area, there is just a layer of skin and a layer of subcutaneous fat overlying the ribs. Here's how to feel that layer of fat:

Tissue Tent Test

With your thumb and index finger, press deeply in towards the ribs and then, while continuing to press inward, close your thumb and index finger together, **pinching all of the tissue between your fingers**. Once you have all the tissue gathered between your fingers, **pull**

outward making a tent of your dog's tissue. As you do that, you will feel a layer of slightly bumpy-textured tissue below the skin slip through your fingers in the direction of the red arrow in **Figure 2**. That's your dog's layer of subcutaneous fat. Estimate how thick it is.

In an active dog, canine athlete, or working dog, that layer should be as thin as a folded piece of duct tape.

Many people can't feel that layer at first, and usually it's because they aren't grabbing enough tissue, so remember: **pinch deep** and **hold tight** as you pull the tissue tent away from the skin.

We recommend that you use the Tissue Tent Test to monitor your dog's body fat layer weekly and adjust its food intake appropriately.
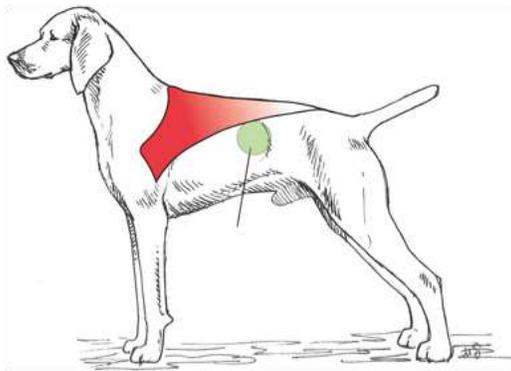

Figure 1. To palpate the layer of subcutaneous fat, pinch the tissues in the area of the last few ribs, just below the latissimus dorsi muscle. In that area, there is just skin and subcutaneous fat overlying the ribs.
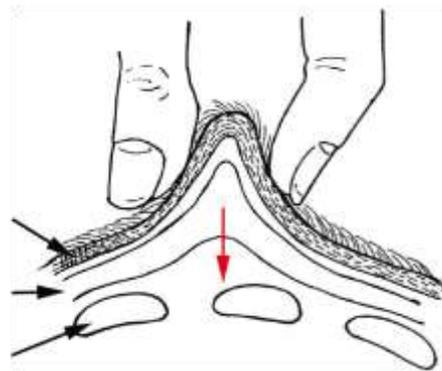

Figure 2. When the mobile skin and subcutaneous tissues over the ribcage are pinched and pulled away from the ribs, the layer of subcutaneous fat slips through the fingers first (red arrow).

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