



The Royal Canin Cut-out & Keep guide

Body condition scoring in cats and dogs

Author: Marianne Diez

(Please refer to page 2 for biography)

The combination of data on stature and on body weight introduces the concept of morphometric techniques to evaluate body composition. Morphometry measures the outer form, evaluates certain body regions and how their dimensions change and shows their relationship to the modifications in the body composition. The morphometric techniques used on dogs are body condition scoring and techniques that combine diverse body parameter measurements (length and circumference of various parts of the body).

The body index is a semi-quantitative subjective evaluation method combining the evaluation of visible characteristics and a palpation of certain regions of the

body. This evaluation is conducted in accordance with simple criteria: the size and location of major adipose deposits, the visible and invisible skeletal structure, and the silhouette of the animal.

Several types of index have been proposed:

- 3 grades: 1 = slim, 2 = optimal, 3 = excessive
- **5 grades: 1 = gaunt, 2 = slim, 3 = optimal, 4 = overweight, 5 = obese** (Edney & Smith, 1986) (Tables 1 & 2)
- and even 9 grades: 1-4 = emaciated to slim; 5 = optimal; 6-9 increasingly overweight (Laflamme, 1993; Laflamme *et al*, 1994).

Table 1. Body condition scoring in cats











 <p>Emaciated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ribcage, spine, shoulder blades and pelvis easily visible (short hair) • Obvious loss of muscle mass • No palpable fat on rib cage
 <p>Thin</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ribcage, spine, shoulder blades and pelvis visible • Obvious abdominal tuck (waist) • Minimal abdominal fat
 <p>Ideal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ribcage, spine not visible but easily palpable • Obvious abdominal tuck (waist) • Little abdominal fat
 <p>Overweight</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ribcage, spine not easily palpable • Abdominal tuck (waist) absent • Obvious abdominal distension
 <p>Obese</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massive thoracic, spinal and abdominal fat deposits • Massive abdominal distension

Table 2. Body condition scoring in dogs

 Emaciated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ribcage, spine, shoulder blades and pelvis easily visible (short hair) • Obvious loss of muscle mass • No palpable fat on rib cage
 Thin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ribcage, spine, shoulder blades and pelvis visible • Obvious abdominal tuck (waist) • No palpable fat on rib cage
 Ideal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ribcage, spine, shoulder blades and pelvis not visible but easily palpable • Obvious abdominal tuck (waist) • Thin layer of fat tissue palpable on rib cage
 Overweight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ribcage, spine, shoulder blades and hipbones palpable with difficulty • Abdominal tuck (waist) absent • Fat deposit obvious on spine and base of tail
 Obese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massive fat deposits on thorax, spine and base of tail • Obvious abdominal distension

The dogs presenting an average index corresponding to an optimal weight have a fat mass of around 13%. When a 5-grade body index is used, every half-grade in the index represents a 10%-increase in fat mass. As a consequence, a dog presenting a body index of 5, which corresponds to the qualification ‘morbid obesity,’ has a fatty mass of over 40%.

The advantage of these index systems is that they can be easily applied by the clinician and that they do not apply exclusively to the diagnosis of obesity but also to its active prevention. It is easy to weigh the animal during a routine consultation and find the value in the index. ♦

FURTHER READING

Edney ATB, Smith PM. Study of obesity in dogs visiting veterinary practices in the United Kingdom. *Vet Rec* 1986; **118**: 391-6.
 Laflamme DP. Body condition scoring and weight maintenance, in Proceedings. *The NA Vet Conf*, 1993, 290-291.

Laflamme DP, Kealy RD, Schmidt DA. Estimation of body fat by body condition score. *J Vet Int Med* 1994; **8**: 154A

