# World Pet Obesity Month Puts Pets First With New Communication Guidelines

*Interactive tools, calculators, and wording guidance help veterinary teams, pet owners, media and brands discuss body condition respectfully .*




World Pet Obesity Month 2026 encourages pet owners and veterinary teams to assess body condition, start better conversations, and use free APOP tools and resources.

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Free guidelines and tools help pet owners and veterinary teams talk about body condition. Two surveys invite both groups to contribute to research, with participation from clinics across the country essential for tracking body condition.

> Obesity is a disease, and the first treatment is the conversation. These guidelines help pet owners hear a diagnosis and treatment plan, not blame."
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> *Dr. Ernie Ward (DVM)*

LELAND, N.C., October 1, 2026. For World Pet Obesity Month, the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP) is inviting pet owners and veterinary teams to take a closer look at body condition and start better conversations about what it means for each pet. The campaign features the updated interactive 2026 Pet Obesity Communication Guidelines, free body-condition tools and calculators, and two research surveys.

Many pets carry more body fat than their owners recognize. In APOP's 2022 Pet Obesity Prevalence Survey, 59% of dogs and 61% of cats assessed at participating U.S. clinics had body condition scores in the overweight or obesity ranges. Among owners whose pets scored in those ranges, 32% described their pet as "normal," "ideal" or "thin." The finding points to a recognition gap, not a lack of care.

“Obesity is a disease, and the first treatment is the conversation,” said Ernie Ward, DVM, CVFT, founder of APOP and author of the Guidelines. “These guidelines give every veterinary team, every journalist and every brand respectful and precise language to describe pet obesity, so a pet owner hears a diagnosis and a treatment plan, not blame.”




APOP’s 2026 Pet Obesity Prevalence Survey invites veterinary clinics to measure body condition in dogs and cats from October 1 through December 31, 2026.

Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP), a nonprofit organization advancing pet obesity awareness, research, prevention, and care.

The interactive Guidelines are designed to be used, not simply read. They include wording examples, conversation scenarios, and guidance on respectful images for veterinary teams, pet owners, journalists, marketers, and other pet-health communicators. They put the pet first, recommending “a dog with obesity” rather than “an obese dog,” and provide practical guidance for discussing body condition without blame or stigma. The Guidelines also define overweight, obesity used descriptively, preclinical obesity, and clinical obesity. The preclinical and clinical categories are proposed for veterinary use and are not validated as diagnostic standards. The Guidelines are free at petobesityprevention.org/communication-guidelines.

Pet owners can use APOP’s free body and muscle condition charts and food and treat calculators to prepare for a conversation with their veterinarian. The tools help owners ask about body condition, portions, activity, and practical next steps. Calculators provide starting estimates, not individual feeding prescriptions. Resources are at petobesityprevention.org/pet-owner-resources.

The two surveys address different questions: how common excess body fat is among pets seen in veterinary practice, and how pet owners and veterinary teams understand and manage it.

Pet owners and veterinary professionals can share their views in the 2026 Pet Obesity and Nutrition Opinion Survey. It takes a few minutes at bit.ly/apop2026opinion and remains open through December 31. Participants may enter an optional drawing for a chance to win $50 gift cards.

The 2026 Pet Obesity Prevalence Survey supports APOP's ongoing surveillance of body condition in dogs and cats. Conducted every few years, it provides repeated snapshots from veterinary practices to help inform education, prevention, and weight care. Participation from clinics across the country is essential to including a broad range of communities and patients.

"Because we collect these data only every few years, each survey matters," said Laura Ward, MA, Executive Director of APOP. "We need returning and first-time clinics from communities across the country to help us understand body condition in a wider range of dogs and cats."

Clinics choose one full day, two days, or one week between October 1 and December 31 and record weight, veterinary-assessed body condition, and the owner's initial impression for every eligible adult dog and cat, regardless of body condition. Qualifying U.S. practices receive a stipend for research participation. Register at petobesityprevention.org/surveysignup.

World Pet Obesity Month runs throughout October. Both surveys remain open through December 31, beyond the October awareness campaign.

About the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention

The Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 2005 by veterinarian Dr. Ernie Ward. APOP has conducted clinic-based pet obesity prevalence surveys since 2007 and the annual Pet Obesity and Nutrition Opinion Survey since 2016. petobesityprevention.org

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