By Lisa Lew- NHS Cat Wrangler

The definition of a "fat cat" is a wealthy and powerful person, typically one involved in business or politics. It is often associated with someone who is living an over-indulgent lifestyle that many think should be admired. Contrary to popular belief, a fat cat is not a happy cat, or a healthy cat. Every year, veterinarians are seeing rising numbers of fat, or obese cats in their offices. Once a cat becomes fat or obese, getting the weight off can be very difficult, so focusing on preventing weight gain is in the cat's best interest. If a cat is put on a very strict diet, it can develop issues that can be fatal, so slow weight loss is key. Overweight cats suffer more medical issues and run a higher risk of dying prematurely than slim cats. Fat cats are more prone to arthritis, diabetes, urinary tract disease, respiratory difficulties, skin issues, and other injuries caused by falls and jumps. Fat cats have trouble reaching all areas of their bodies to self-groom, so if they are unable to keep themselves clean, they can become depressed or ill. When cats are not doing normal cat things like running, jumping, and pouncing because they are in pain, they can become reluctant to move at all, resulting in increased lethargy, and more weight gain. Many fat cats are also unhappy about being picked up and held because it is just not comfortable for them.

When cats have access to food all day, many are apt to over-eat. Some cats and dogs are able to self-regulate their eating, but those pets are the exception. Many owners like the convenience of leaving dry food out for their cats at all times, but this is not ideal. Monitoring your cat's eating habits is an important tool to know what is normal behavior for your cat. If a cat that is always excited to get its food is suddenly not interested in eating, then that is something to monitor. Having food available all the time removes that bit of information about your pet's health that could be important in diagnosing illness.

The biggest cause of fat cats is US! Busy lives, overfeeding, not enough exercise, combined with resorting to "cupboard love" results in overweight cats. If you look at your cat from above, you should see a distinct waistline and be able to easily feel ribs and see their outlines through a moderate coating of fat. It's important to watch their everyday eating habits, and not misinterpret requests for attention and play as demands for food- sometimes the cats just want to play! Just like with dogs, it's important to not give in to begging. If your cat is just a little pudgy, you may be able to simply feed a bit less food and treats and make your cat exercise more through play. If your cat is too fat, your first step should be to schedule a visit with your veterinarian to rule out any health concerns, and to decide on a weight loss goal. If your cat is very overweight, be prepared for a long process. Never put your cat on a crash diet because it can result in hepatic lipidosis, an often fatal liver disease. Your veterinarian can suggest an appropriate food, and the correct amount to feed for slow weight loss.

If you just can't bear not giving your pudgy cat treats, then make them work for them. Make your cat run and chase treats, or only give treats after a long, interactive play session that includes a lot of jumping and pouncing. It is very easy to dispense more treats than you realize. You can also use the cat's dry kibble as a treat if you remove some of the daily measured amount you normally feed. Some people stash treats around the house as a game for the cat to hunt and find. Even though it can seem like quite a challenge, preventing your cat from becoming overweight or obese from the start is always easier than trying to get that weight off after the fact. If you feed your cat the correct amount to keep it at an appropriate weight, then it will never know what it's missing. If you need to restrict a heavy cat's food intake, they will usually know it, and make sure you know it too!