

**MEDIA RELEASE****13 March 2009**

## **Dog obesity still a growing problem in New Zealand**

It might seem unusual for a pet food company to be encouraging consumers to feed their pets less of their product. However, that's exactly what Purina New Zealand is recommending to owners with overweight dogs to help them live longer.

"There's no doubt that New Zealand has an increasing number of overweight dogs," says Crystal Corben, a Veterinary Nurse and Pet Care advisor for Purina New Zealand.

"We are receiving an increasing number of calls on our consumer care hotline from people concerned that their dog is overweight, and how best to feed them."

Ms Corben says overweight dogs may be susceptible to health problems such as impaired heart and breathing functions, digestive disturbances, skin problems and diabetes.

"The veterinary prescription for helping dogs live longer isn't a vaccine or medication; it's simply smaller portions of food," says Ms Corben.

Ms Corben cites findings from a 14-year study by Purina USA that monitored the effects of diet on life span and age-related changes in dogs.

The 14-year Purina "Life Span" study found that dogs that consumed 25 percent fewer calories than their littermates during their lifetimes maintained a lean or ideal body condition\*, resulting in a longer life.

"The results show that lean dogs can live longer and healthier lives," says Ms Corben.

Ms Corben says that owners with obese dogs should reduce the dog's calorie intake in conjunction with a weight management and exercise plan, developed with a veterinarian.

"Pushing 'play' with your dog for 30 minutes a day can make a great difference to their weight and health. Start with moderate exercise, and gradually increase the length of walks and play time."

"Overweight pets can experience fatigue at the beginning of an exercise programme, so keep an eye out for any shortness of breath and allow your dog to rest as needed."

Ms Corben says that in addition to eating less food overall, high-calorie treats and table scraps should be avoided.

“Keeping a small amount of your dog’s regular food aside to use as treats helps prevent overfeeding, while still allowing you to treat your dog,” she says.

Last month, Purina New Zealand launched its annual 30-Day Challenge campaign, a program designed to promote better health for pets. Consumers can take the challenge and help make a difference to their pet’s health in just 30 days by visiting [www.purinaone.co.nz/challenge](http://www.purinaone.co.nz/challenge)

To find out more about quality weight management products for pets, visit [www.purina.co.nz](http://www.purina.co.nz)

*\*Ideal body condition: physical assessment of health defined as when you can feel and see the outline of a dog’s ribs, there is a waist when viewed from above and the abdomen is tucked up when viewed from the side. See Purina’s Dog body condition scoring system for more information. [www.purina.com/dogs/health/bodycondition.aspx](http://www.purina.com/dogs/health/bodycondition.aspx)*

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**About Nestlé Purina New Zealand**

- For over eighty years Purina has been a leader in the advancement of pet care and pet nutrition.
- Purina’s expert nutritionists, food scientists, vets, and animal behaviorists are constantly discovering new ways to help pets lead healthier, happier, longer lives.
- No one invests more in research and development, and as a result Purina has made more breakthroughs in the field than any other company.
- Today Purina is one of the world’s leading pet care companies, producing some of the best known pet food brands; many of which have served pet owners for generations. Each is the result of the very latest advances in quality, taste and nutrition.
- Purina products are designed to give pets and their owners the best possible choice of recipes and formats, for every life stage and lifestyle.
- Purina is also a committed member of the wider pet care community, supporting charitable organisations, working closely with the communities in which we work and operate, and promoting responsible pet ownership in New Zealand and worldwide.
- With over seventy per cent of New Zealand households owning pets, Nestlé Purina is servicing a growing market.
- Throughout the company’s long history in the pet care business, it has built strong brands such as TUX, FRISKIES and FANCY FEAST.
- In 2002 the company acquired Ralston Purina, which saw the introduction of brands such as Purina ONE, BENEFUL and PRO PLAN.