

Body Condition Score Chart

The 1–9 scale every vet uses to size up your dog

1–3 · Underweight

Ribs, spine, and pelvic bones visible without effort. No palpable fat. Severe muscle loss at 1; mild at 3. Often a clinical sign — talk to your vet about diet and screen for parasites and chronic illness.

4–5 · Ideal

Ribs felt easily under a thin layer of fat, but not visually prominent. Visible waist behind the ribs when viewed from above. Tucked abdomen from the side. This is the target.

6 · Slightly overweight

Ribs palpable with mild pressure. Waist visible but less defined. Abdominal tuck reduced. The most common BCS in adult US pet dogs — and the easiest to reverse with a 10–15% calorie cut.

7 · Overweight

Ribs hard to feel under fat layer. Waist absent or barely visible. Noticeable fat over the lumbar area and tail base. Requires a vet-supervised weight-loss plan; willpower alone rarely reverses it.

8–9 · Obese

Ribs not palpable without firm pressure. Distended abdomen. Heavy fat deposits over lumbar, tail base, and chest. Joint disease, diabetes, and reduced lifespan are well-documented at BCS 8+. Treat as a medical condition.

How to score

Run flat hands over the rib cage with light pressure. Look from above for the waist. Look from the side for abdominal tuck. Photograph monthly — owners' eyes calibrate to gradual gain. The scale below is from Hill's Pet Nutrition's BCS chart, adopted by WSAVA.