

# When Perception Meets Reality: Owner Accuracy in Assessing Dog Body Condition

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## INTRODUCTION

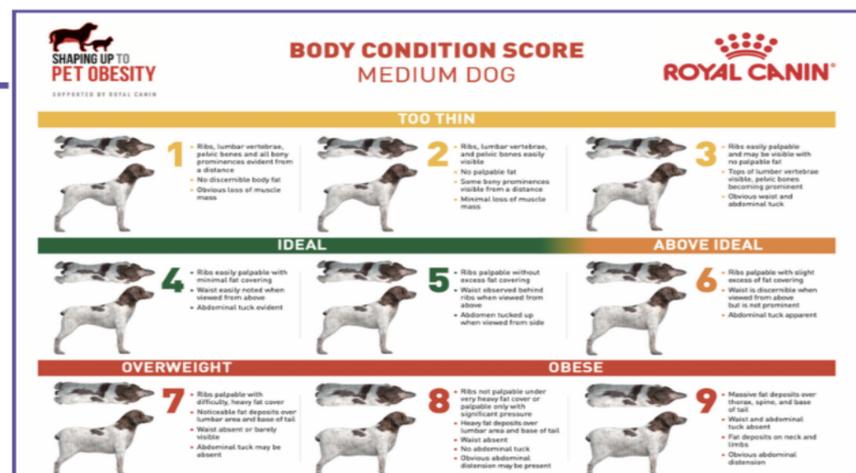
Body condition is a key indicator of health status and overall welfare in dogs.

- Appropriate body weight influences not only physical health but also psychological well-being and the ability to express natural behaviours.
- Because owners spend the most time with their dogs, they are typically the first to assess their animals' body condition; therefore, their perception of nutritional status plays a critical role in both the prevention and management of weight-related disorders.
- Veterinarians also play a central role in this process and must be able to communicate concerns about non-optimal body condition effectively and sensitively during clinical consultations.
- The present study investigated perceptual discrepancies in the evaluation of canine body condition between dog owners and experts, specifically a veterinarian and a university student in a program of veterinary sciences.



## METHODS

- Two scales for assessing body condition (the 5-point and 9-point Body Condition Score scale) were employed.
- A total of 92 dogs and their owners participated.
- Each dog was independently evaluated by three assessors.
- Differences in scoring were analyzed in relation to owner characteristics (sex, age, experience with dog ownership, and level of physical activity) and dog attributes (age, sex, breed, coat length, activity level, and health status).



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- The findings revealed that owners frequently misjudged their dogs' body condition.
- The weakest agreement, based on Spearman's correlation, was observed between owners and veterinarians (5-point scale:  $r_s = 0.5693$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ).
- Owner sex, age, physical activity, and ownership experience had no statistically significant influence on BCS accuracy ( $p > 0.05$ ).
- A tendency toward underestimation was evident among inexperienced, younger, and older owners.
- Most dog-related variables did not significantly affect the results, except coat length.
- Owners of short-haired dogs showed significantly stronger agreement with veterinarians on the 5-point scale ( $p < 0.01$ ), while long-haired dogs were more often overestimated ( $p < 0.05$ ).
- The effect of coat length was not significant on the 9-point scale ( $p > 0.05$ ).
- Overall, evaluations made using the 9-point scale were more accurate.



## CONCLUSION

- Results emphasize the need to improve owner awareness and education regarding body condition assessment and maintaining optimal health in dogs.

## References

- 1.) WSAVA, 2013: Body Condition Score. <https://wsava.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Body-Condition-Score-Dog.pdf>
- 2.) Royal Canin, 2013: Body Condition Score Charts. <https://www.royalcanin.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/BCS-chart-03.12.13.pdf>

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