



Dog Training & Behavior Services

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Feeding Guidelines for Food Motivation

If any of the things listed below are true for you, then you should adjust your dog's feeding routine. This article has suggestions to help make your dog motivated for daily meals and generally more excited for training due to an increase in food motivation.

- My dog is **not interested in his/her treats** when in class or outside.
- My dog just seems to be **uninterested in training**, or lacking motivation in general.
- My dog **doesn't eat right away** when I put his/her food down.
- I need to **add things to my dogs kibble** just to get him/her to eat anything.
- I want a dog who is **HIGHLY motivated to work for me**.

First of all, it is **NOT** natural for a healthy dog to not be motivated by food. Food sustains life, so refusing food means that they are either being given too much or they are holding out for only the good stuff. Certainly dogs have their own taste, but they should be willing to eat just about any dog treat or kibble you offer them, maybe with just a few exceptions.

Giving your dog an occasional tasty treat is not a problem, but just like cupcakes and candy, the special stuff should be saved for special occasions, or in our case, for training. You can even feed your dog "people food," just be sure they eat their meals first and to avoid

begging, give it to them in their bowl, instead of from the counter or table.

Here is how to get started. Keep in mind, for dogs who have been on their own eating schedule for quite some time, it may take some tough love to get them back to being hungry for meal times again.

- ◇ If you are free feeding (leaving food out all day to eat as they please), **STOP**. Food is a very valuable training tool, and by giving them free access to it, they find no need to work for it. Really, why wouldn't they blow you off when you ask for a sit if they can just eat later when they are actually hungry?
- ◇ Meals should be given 2-3x a day and left down for 10 minutes **ONLY!** Whatever is not eaten after 10 minutes gets picked up and put back in the food bin (not added to the next meal). You will continue this routine until your dog is regularly eating at each meal. Depending on your dog, that might be after a day or a week.
- ◇ Having your dog sit & wait for his/her meals can also help to increase food motivation. Working for it really does make them appreciate it more!
- ◇ On days you do training with your dog, be sure to adjust the amount of food they eat according to how many treats were given (less kibble because of more treats).



HELPFUL HINTS

*DO NOT feed your dog other items during this process, just because you think they are hungry. They WILL eat when they are actually hungry.

*If after a week your dog is still just picking at it's kibble, try a different kibble with a different protein source (ex. Switch from Chicken to Fish).

*If your dog becomes more excited to eat it's meals, but is still leaving some kibble after 10 minutes, you are feeding too much. Feed that much less at each meal.

*Stop adding things to your dogs food to get him to eat more. Keep in mind, that a decreased appetite can mean that something is wrong with your dog. It could be as simple as an ear infection or uti or something more complicated. Watch for changes in your dog's eating routine. Those changes are so much easier to spot if they are typically excited for their meals and eating it up immediately.

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Using Treats for Positive Reinforcement Training

Many people think that their dog should work for them simply to make them happy. While a few dogs will offer behaviors for simple praise and affection (generally dogs that don't get praise and affection for free) most dogs don't want to work hard for free (would you?). Every dog is an individual and what they find most rewarding will depend on the dogs personality. Some enjoy treats or toys, while others would rather work for a chance at affection or playtime with you. Teaching a dog can be very frustrating for dog and owner if the dog does not understand what he/she is supposed to do. We need to teach them in a way that they can understand.

The use of lure and reward training for new behaviors is a great training tool that creates motivation for the dogs to work for us. The dog learns that they are rewarded with something they find valuable when they do certain behaviors and are more likely to continue that behavior. The problem is that some owners are seduced by how effective training is with the use of food. While it is a great teaching tool, it can also be a crutch if used for too long. For a basic behavior like sit, depending on the individual dog, a lure should only be used 10-15 times, and should then be replaced by an unbaited hand doing the same hand motion and reward with the other hand (treat hidden) once the dog completes the behavior. If your dog is having trouble, just be patient. When your dog finally performs, surprise him with a big reward. Your dog will learn that you may have treats even if he can't see them.

Work at Your Dogs Level

Dogs don't generalize very well. This means that even though your dog knows the down command in your home, he won't necessarily be able to perform or

understand the command in a more exciting or distracting situation. It is important that the trainer takes this into consideration and teaches their dog the behavior in many different places and situations. When in a new or particularly difficult situation, you should reward good behaviors heavily and try not to ask too much of your dog (work at your dogs level).

When training, always keep in mind that you should set your dog up to succeed and don't ask for behaviors you don't think they will be able to perform in that situation. Instead, make a mental note and be sure to practice with your dog in that situation or work up to it so that your dog can be successful. If you dog has never had practice in certain challenging situations, you need to consider that and set them up to succeed by lowering distractions or increasing distance from the distraction.

Weaning your Dog Off Treats

Once your dog is performing behaviors with ease and without a lure, you can begin to move to a **random reinforcement schedule**. Dogs will be more likely to perform behaviors if they think they have a chance at something they enjoy like treats (or toys/praise if your dog values that), so a random reinforcement schedule (give treats every 3rd, 5th, 2nd, 5th etc time) makes them consider doing the behavior for the chance of a reward. It is equally as important to reinforce if your dog doesn't comply when you are sure he/she is capable (low distraction environment, not asking too much of your dog). You can also begin to use rewards of different values such as chicken, regular treats, and kibble. These are examples of A, B, and C grade rewards. It is a good idea to reward the fastest responses to encourage your dog to give you the behavior quickly. Jackpot can be used when your dog does a behavior exceptionally well. A Jackpot consists of a bunch of tiny treats given rapidly right after the behavior is done. Reward a really fast down with an A grade reward, or a slow sit with



a C grade reward or maybe just a pat on the head and "good boy."

Life Rewards

It is important that once your dog knows the behaviors, to integrate them into your everyday life. You can ask your dog for a sit or down before playing a game of fetch or sit and wait at the door before going outside or before receiving dinner. Dog's quickly begin to understand: "If you sit and wait, I will give you dinner. If you don't, I won't!" This type of training is very effective once your dog understands the concept. Not only does your dog learn to work when the owner does not have food in hand, but also begins to learn the relevance of sitting when told. It helps to put your dog on a "Nothing in Life is Free" program, so that anything your dog finds of value (ex. Walks, dinner, playing, affection) they will be required to work for (sit, down, stay, giving calm behavior etc).

