

# HEALTHY REWARDS



## What is a reward?

**Only your dog has the answer. A reward is not a reward if it has little or no value to your dog.**

*“A reward's intensity is strictly dependent on the dog's perception of its intensity. A dog who does not particularly enjoy playing fetch would find a tennis ball a very low intensity reward (and possibly rate it as no reward at all.) For a retrieving fanatic, you might not find anything that had greater intensity. I know dogs that would disregard entire steaks if their favorite bumper or ball were offered, and others who will accept a toy but far prefer food. Still others will pass up food or toys in exchange for exuberant, highly physical praise from their handler, eating the liver or grabbing the ball only after the emotional peak has passed.” - Suzanne Clothier*

## “What kind of food rewards should I use?”

### Size, texture and smell

Training treats should be small, soft, tasty and quickly swallowed. It is best if they are aromatic - smelly!) At home or in non-distracting places that your dog is comfortable, his own dog food kibble or small dry treats will be fine. In class, at the park or around hard-to-resist distractions, your food-power must be greater than the distraction your dog faces.

**Some suggestions:** Cubed Natural Balance or Roll-over meat roll (“canned” dog food in sausage form). Cubed lean meat: chicken, turkey, beef, lamb, lean hamburger patty. Organ meats - liver, kidney, beef heart, chicken liver. Low-fat cheese (string cheese, mozzarella or Swiss - go easy on the cheddar, it's high in fat. Thinly sliced and quartered wieners, pre-cooked meatballs, luncheon meat. Non-sugary breakfast cereal, croutons, goldfish crackers, flavored rice cakes. Peanut butter sandwich or cheese melted between two flour tortillas - rolled flat with a rolling pin and cut into squares with a pizza cutter. Is your dog picky and hard to motivate? Try canned cat food or water-packed tuna on a spoon. Some dogs really like carrots, banana chips and other vegetables and fruits, although they are rarely aromatic enough in high stress or distracting situations.

**But I thought you weren't supposed to feed your dog “People Food”!** That bag of dog food that you open every day is FULL of “people food” ... meat, grains, vegetables. The biggest difference between the food on your plate and the food that is turned into meat flavored cereal in your dog's bowl? Quality. If you are horrified by the “allowable quantity of fly parts” in the wieners you feed your kids, imagine what they allow in pet food! The chicken meat meal in your dog food might very well be beaks and feet or the meat of old tough birds or worse, things no human would consider eating. Chicken breast is better!

**The Twinkie Factor:** Sometimes the one food your dog thinks is the BEST isn't really a healthy choice, or you can't stand it. My dogs LOVE salmon treats. I hate the fact that after a training session my fingers are fishy hours later. A dog's sense of smell is greater than his sense of taste, so by putting salmon treats in with other food treats, you can create salmon flavored chicken bits or wiener flavored Cheerios. Those grocery store aisle treats are full of sugar and artificial flavors and colors and preservatives you can't pronounce, but they will also impart that “flavor” onto other foods. So dice them up small and add them to your bag of “trail mix” and you can be generous with the flavor they crave, without filling them full of unhealthy treats.

**Satiation** - Don't train your pup on a full stomach. Feed your dog less or, for small or picky pups, skip dinner entirely before class! Variety is important. Too much of a good thing is not a good thing! As much as you might like Thanksgiving turkey, after several days of the same old turkey leftovers you might have a craving for some plain old macaroni & cheese!

**Foods to avoid:** Gristle or fat. Rinse off rich sauces. Go easy on pork, it is hard to digest. No chocolate, raisins, grapes, onions. NOTHING from your plate *while you are eating!* (This is how begging is learned!)

**If your dog has allergies or health concerns** consult your veterinarian - read the ingredients list on his dog food for suggestions of what is safe (whatever meat is the meat source will be safe, rice cakes for rice based, diced potato bits for potato based diets. A can of your dog's special diet or hypo-allergenic food (mix with a little flour if needed - rice flour if it's a rice-base diet) and roll it out on a cookie sheet, bake and cut with a pizza cutter into bite sized pieces while still warm.

## NON-FOOD & REAL LIFE REWARDS

Your dog should learn to work for everything it values - like your attention! Have him sit before praise, petting, toys, games, privileges. Real-life rewards: have him do something before getting to get in or out of the car, go through doors, get a leash put on, go sniff, greet visitors, play with another animal, chase a squirrel. THIS is how you get beyond using food.

**My dog doesn't like food.** Hand feed her all her meals (nothing by bowl, only by hand). Whatever you would normally feed her in her bowl, put in a plastic bag for the day and give it to her from your hand unexpectedly, a few kibble at a time, many times a day and not always in the kitchen. If she declines the offer, just say, “oh, too bad” and walk away. Don't try to talk her into eating - it's her choice to go hungry or eat. If you don't give in, eventually she will take it from your hand! Unless the dog is sick or severely underweight, it will not hurt her to miss a few meals if she so chooses.

# WHY HAND FEED?

---

*If your dog is pushy, bossy, or rude; hard to motivate, disinterested, or has its own agenda, (or even if it isn't!) hand feeding will improve your relationship with your dog.*

---

From the day your puppy was born, his mother controlled a resource that kept him alive: *food*. When mom appeared, so did dinner. When mom left, so did dinner. It was critical that the pups knew where she was at all times and that the litter remained close to her. They would die if they didn't. Puppies are careful not to bite mom too hard or act disrespectfully to her, because if they did she would leave abruptly - and so would their life line. Wouldn't you like to be THAT important to your dog? You can be!

## **Hand feeding will improve your dog's:**

- Work ethic
- Manners around food
- Regard for your leadership

**Rationing meals and making delivery contingent on a selected behavior increases value of the reward and your importance in the dog's life.** Suddenly your dog's world revolves around you - he's looking for ways to please you instead of demanding what he wants for free. He WANTS to work!

## **Not forever, but to set the stage and get the training ball rolling ...**

For the first week of training (or longer if you have a hard to motivate or bossy dog) stop feeding your dog from a bowl and use the dog's entire day's ration for short and frequent training sessions throughout the day. At the end of the day whatever is left in the container can be fed in the dog's bowl - but be aware that this amount reflects just how little training you did that day! In the weeks to come you will gradually use less food in training and will go back to regularly scheduled meals, but you must still deduct the amount of food that you will use in daily training sessions from what goes in your dog's bowl so you don't create a fat dog.

## **Measure out the day's ration each morning and put it in a container and leave it in plain view or put it in a fanny pack or pocket and carry it with you. This will:**

- Keep you from over or under feeding
- Make sure you make time to practice!

## **The following will upset the balance of your training and relationship:**

- Free feeding - a full bowl on the floor all the time
- Responding to begging or bossy barking
  - don't train when you are eating - no food from your plate!
- Doling out goodies just for being "cute"
- Letting the dog dictate when it needs fed, petted, played with - and when it's through. That's your job!

## **You control the food and hence the behavior that earns it. Food is not free.**

- Reward, don't bribe. The food appears AFTER the dog has earned it.
  - don't show the dog what you have to offer before giving a command.
  - you may show him what he missed if he doesn't - and then leave or ignore him!
- Always call the dog for a training session when he *isn't* bugging you - don't let him decide when it's time.
  - polite dogs get to work! Work will become reinforcing in itself!
- Sometimes call the dog when it is engaged in doing something else but only if you are sure he will respond.
  - if he doesn't, don't bribe him. Run away, play with a toy, become more interesting than what he was doing at the time. NO NAGGING. Never call him to do something he finds unpleasant.
- Give a simple command or two and then dismiss him - don't respond to impolite pestering to continue.
- Gradually call him away from more interesting activities as his responses become more reliable.
  - this is how you teach him to come no matter what!

## **VARY the types of rewards.**

Identify your dog's greatest motivators. Toys? Games? Touch? Ration them so you can use them as rewards. What does your dog want? A door opened? It's leash put on? A ball thrown? A ride in the car? ALL of these activities can be more valuable to your dog than a food treat. Don't give them for free. Ask your dog to do something to earn them. THIS is the answer to "how do I get rid of the food?" - replace it with real life rewards!