

Teaching your Dog to Eat

There are many unpleasant consequences to having a “fussy” eater; you basically have no control over when the dog eats (I’m not hungry right now), what he eats (I don’t like this!), how much he eats (three kernels was plenty, thanks), or when he ate last (an important question when you are prepping for emergency surgery).

You have no control over how much he weighs and HE is busy playing mind games with you over control of the food.

We’ve done a lot of experimenting with changing a dog’s performance and behavior with how much and when we will feed as well.

For instance, dogs with a shy tendency and dogs who tend to put too much pressure on themselves in competition are fed as close to ring-time as possible to change their body chemistry and calm down.

Dogs who tend to be a bit lethargic are fed three hours before ring-time to give them energy to perform. You can’t do this with a “fussy” eater.

Many people habitually starve their “fussy” eaters every show weekend, hoping they’ll perform better because they’re hungry. Try telling THAT to a football player!

In order to perform, an athlete must be properly fed and properly rested. To achieve this, a dog must understand the rules of his universe. So here’s the training method to teach your dog to eat on cue.

- Decide how much food the dog should be getting in one day. If you are unsure, consult your veterinarian and look at the bag of dog food you have purchased. There should be a chart on the bag of how much to feed by weight.
- Let’s say your dog should be getting two cups of food per day. Divide the amount into two meals. Develop a ritual—say “Are you hungry? Where’s your dish? Where’s the food? Alright! Get in the kennel (or on your mat, or whatever)!” Put down the cup of food and count to five.
- If you get to five and the dog is eating, that’s fine.
- If, at any time after you’ve counted to five and the dog is eating, he turns away from the dish before he finishes the meal, say nothing, pick up the dish and put the food away.
- If you get to five and the dog isn’t eating, say nothing, pick up the dish and put it away. Give him nothing until his next scheduled meal, 12 hours later (for an adult dog).



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- If the dog either doesn't approach the dish or turns away from the food before it's all gone and you go to take the dish away, measure what's left. At the next scheduled meal, give him half of what he ate at the previous meal. If he ate 6 kernels of food and wandered off, he'll have 3 kernels of food in his dish at the next meal. If he eats two of those kernels and wanders off, give him one kernel at the next meal.

Of course you care what he eats and whether he is healthy or not, but it's very important that you don't take responsibility for whether he chooses to eat or not.

People who worry that the dog will starve to death don't get healthy dogs. They get dogs who hold out for days without eating, who "demand" to have their food changed every few days.

Remember, you're not withholding food from your dog. You're offering him food twice a day. You're giving him the same window of opportunity you give him in any training situation. If the dog is healthy and just "fussy", all he has to do is choose to eat. His choice.

Source: Sue Ailsby

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