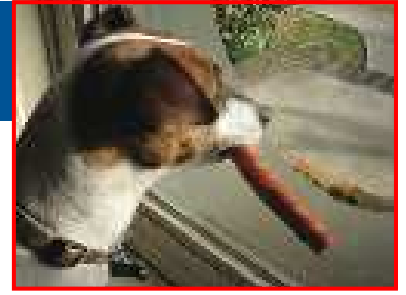


Giving Food Treats

by Jacqueline C. Neilson, DVM, DACVB



Successful Snacking During Weight Loss

Do you let your dog lick the dinner dishes every night or always give him/her the last bite of your sandwich? Maybe the bank teller routinely hands out a treat? Patterns like these can be hard to change because your dog now expects food rewards. But snacks or treats can add a surprisingly high number of calories to your dog's total intake and potentially interfere with a weight loss plan.

Reducing your dog's appetite should help, but he/she may still beg. Try combating "snack factor" damage by substituting another type of treat – play, a walk, petting. Realistically, though, you may still want the option to use food treats at least occasionally. Be sure to consult with your veterinarian about appropriate choices. With your veterinarian's permission, here are 5 tips for successful snacking:

- **Make treats small!** A food treat should be about the size of your pinkie fingernail. For store-bought treats, you will probably need to break the packaged pieces into smaller bits. Moist treats, which can easily be broken apart, may be better choices than hard, biscuit-type treats that are difficult to split into small enough pieces. Be sure to prepare "resized" treats ahead of time. Often dogs are not particular about the kind of treats as long as they receive something. Try setting aside a portion of your dog's food for the day and using the pieces as individual rewards, or consider purchasing a separate low-calorie food that is used only for treats.
- **Stick to the limit!** Treats require portion control. Calculate the total number of small food treats that can be included in your dog's daily intake and stay strictly within that maximum.
- **Choose low-calorie "goodies"!** Picking low-calorie treats contributes to the success of your dog's weight loss plan. Fresh or frozen vegetables are excellent food treats. Dogs commonly prefer carrots and green beans, and many also like unbuttered popcorn or cooked lean meat. Ice is a treat for some dogs; but hard cubes can damage their teeth, so crushed, smaller pieces of ice are a safer option. If your dog eats fruit, you can give berries and mini fruit pieces as special snacks; but note that grapes are toxic to dogs so avoid feeding them.
- **Make treats last!** Your dog may benefit from an occasional long-lasting treat. "Puzzle" toys, such as the Twist n' Treat and the Squirrel Dude by Premier Pet Products, are examples of ways to turn a small treat into a prolonged activity. Another option is to place a small dog biscuit or piece of rice cake inside a rubber toy, such as a KONG Toy (KONG Company), and make him/her work for the treat rather than simply feeding it. Still another option is to freeze low-calorie, low-sodium chicken broth in a KONG Toy. Seal the small end opening with tape, fill the KONG with soup, and freeze until solid. When ready to give the KONG treat to your dog, remove the tape and inside the toy is a doggie "popsicle"! The safety of giving long-lasting treats like rawhide chews should be discussed with the veterinarian.
- **Beware of calorie pitfalls!** Calories sometimes hide in sneaky places ... the remaining cheese sauce on a dinner plate, melted ice cream in the bottom of a bowl, the butter-coated knife in the dishwasher, the extra French fries at the bottom of the bag, etc. High-fat foods can be dangerous for some dogs, and even small quantities of these high-calorie items can significantly disrupt a weight loss plan, so take steps to prevent your dog's access to those and other high-fat items. Substituting a healthier low-calorie snack is a smart alternative.

Northside Animal Hospital

2317 North M-52, Owosso, MI
48867 TEL: 989.723.1681
<http://northsidevet.net/>