

## All about Training Treats!



**Would you do your best work without a pay cheque? Would you give your work away for free, just cuz your boss said, 'Good Job'? That'd be crazy to expect of you, right?**



Then, lets make sure your dog is 'paid' well for training, which is his job for the next several months!

**First, let's explain the purpose of the treat and how to use it effectively, in your puppy training.**



NOTE: It is important that your puppy is taught to understand 'impulse control' and permission when working with treats. You don't want him so excited by the treat, that he can't focus on the work. (ask us about our 'Impulse Control, Choice & Permission' Training game)

Food treats are often the most convenient & quickest way to influence your dog's behavior. When we are influencing behavior, we are looking for a reinforcer, something that is likely to encourage the dog to repeat the behavior. Treats are a great place to start!

Treats may be used to 'lure' a puppy into a behavior. We rarely do this, since you'll have to carefully 'fade' the treat or you will only get the behavior when the dog is lured by a visible treat, right? This is where lots of folks go wrong in training with treats.

Treats come out only after a behaviour, to pay your dog for doing the right thing and to build the association that his behavior has EARNED him reinforcement - the treat. Reinforcers are associated with completing the behavior, not a reason (lure) to do the behavior.

The pattern for giving a treat goes like this: behavior, marker word, **THEN** reach for your treat and deliver. Of course, the placement of your treat will depend on what you are teaching - and we'll coach you along with that.

Reinforcers can be delivered by you, and when you understand your dog's top reinforcers, they can be powerful ways to teach the behaviors you want. But, dogs will also find reinforcers in the 'great big wonderful world' all on their own. So, you need to be aware of what might be reinforcing a particular behaviour and how you might be able to use those environmental reinforcers. For example:

Throwing a tennis ball can reinforce a long "hold" in position, like 'sit' or 'down' or 'place';  
or a romp in the backyard can reinforce practicing 'hold' by the door instead of bolting out;  
or playing in the dog park can reinforce waiting calmly in the car or at the park's gate for permission to 'break'.

**Next, for this training you will need HIGH VALUE & LOW VALUE treats at times.  
Be sure to have both with you.**

High Value simply means something your dog goes cray-cray about! Something they rarely get and really love! Usually meat based treats!

Low Value is usually their kibble or a less exciting treat!

Only your DOG can tell you what he loves and what is 'high value' for him! If he's not staying engaged with you or 'working, training, playing' for a particular treat, it's not likely 'high value' enough for him, compared to other 'reinforcers' or 'distractions in the situation. Change it up, test different treats to see what he'll choose! Lay down two treats. Which one does your dog take first? Repeat, with that treat and another. Again, which one does your dog take first? He's likely choosing his highest value treat!

REMEMBER: the 'value' of the treat can also be situational: kibble may work in the house, but you might need liver or chicken outside, as distractions, and arousal, increases!

**Be a vending machine at first...then, later you'll be a slot machine:**

When you're teaching your dog new behaviors, it's important to keep them motivated and interested. One of the easiest ways to do that is with a high rate of reinforcement (how often you give rewards).

So, yes, as you start out, give lots of treats - like a vending machine!

We'll teach you how to eventually give praise sometimes, and treats at other times, so that treats become unpredictable, like a slot machine. But, your dog will take the gamble every time and give you the behaviors you want because there just might be more fabulous reinforcement coming!



### **Here are some tips for choosing the right treat for the right situation.**

#### **Something they can eat quickly!**

Remember, when you're teaching your dog new behaviors, you'll be working with a high rate of reinforcement.

In order to give your dog lots of treats in a short period of time, you need to choose ones they can eat quickly.

If your dog gobbles up their treat immediately, you can move to the next repetition right away. They will stay interested and get lots of practice in a short amount of time. But, if your dog spends several seconds eating each treat, that means more time waiting between repetitions, and he could 'leave the room' or disconnect from training.

#### **Very small, soft, smelly pieces!**

Even for large dogs, a pea-sized treat is plenty. For small dogs, you can use even tinier pieces. You need only something the size of your pinky fingernail! Keeping treats small means fewer calories consumed. It also means your puppy won't get full before the session is over.

Also, opt for SOFT foods. Waiting for your dog to find every piece that's crumbled to the floor during a training session, means a distracted puppy and time away from teaching.

Almost all dogs would put SMELLY items like cheese or bacon up at the top of their interesting and unique list!

#### **Interesting & Unique!**

You might be able to get away with using kibble as a reward in your quiet living room, but in a more distracting location, you should pull out the stinky, interesting and unique treats your dog adores.

Keep those treats for 'training' with you! Don't give them out anywhere, anytime.

#### **Change up his training treat occasionally!**

Dogs can become bored with the same old treat. If you notice your dog's enthusiasm is fading, change to a different reward of equal or greater value. You can even use several different treats during the same training session, so your dog never knows what type of delicious morsel will be coming next. Mix it up between low value and high value, too!

#### **Always be ready with treats to reinforce behaviors you love!**

Having food in your pocket or a treat bag at all times will allow you to provide an immediate reward. Look for nonperishable treats that you can carry around, such as freeze-dried liver or jerky treats cut into tiny pieces. Position containers throughout your home, have some in your car, etc. and use them to CAPTURE behaviors you love!

**Store bought dog training treats can be expensive** and high in calories, and may even have ingredients we would prefer our dogs not be eating. Some ideas that we like for treats:

- ~ chicken (cooked, cubed)
- ~ heart (chicken or beef)
- ~ weiners (chicken, cut length-wise, then cut length wise again, and each length cubed)
- ~ real stinky cheese (but in moderation, perhaps reserved for recall. Cheese is high calories and we have more than enough minerals in the North Shore water supply. We only use cheese when training recall, for example.
- ~ 'Tuna Brownies' - using any protein, tuna, salmon, turkey, chicken (recipe in the video mentioned below)
- ~ dog-safe fruits or veggies, if your dog loves them!
- ~ kibble, lightly soaked in low sodium chicken broth so it is softer, and sprinkled with parmesan cheese
- ~ tuna, salmon, chicken, turkey 'puree' delivered from a silicone squeeze tube (great for winter training)
- ~ liver (cooked, cubed or freeze dried)
- ~ raw/fresh dog food 'loaf', cut and cubed

Have a look on our website here and watch the video: 'Some of My Favorite Training Treats' for these ideas, and how we make the treats! <https://www.pawsibilitieswithdogs.net/some-training-videos>

#### **Slow-Eating Dog Training Treats can be used for reinforcing calm & settling behaviors:**

Teaching your dog to love their crate, or helping them pass the time while you're out of the house, or encouraging them to lie quietly beside you while you watch TV or visit a ballgame or concert or cafe, or even helping your puppy to socialize in a new environment, are all perfect situations for a long-lasting treat.

Look for chewy treats like bully sticks that your dog will love. Alternatively, use interactive (puzzles, treat dispensing balls, snuffle mats/balls, etc.) or stuffed toys. A Kong can be filled with plain yogurt or peanut butter, with mini carrots or kibble or apple slices mixed in for a time-consuming treat. Plug the end of a kong or bone, fill it with broth and other goodies, and put it in the freezer for a snack on a hot day or in a situation where you want your puppy to be busy and engaged and not worried, or to eventually finish and be tired out enough to simply sleep.

Source: <https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/training/dog-training-treats/> & [www.youtube.com/watch?v=6P\\_MYUhd\\_BY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6P_MYUhd_BY)

### A note about those dogs that don't seem to want treats at all:

Sometimes, it can **appear** that your dog is not 'food motivated'. This term is actually NOT an accurate description of dogs who may not seem to want to take your treats when training. All dogs are food motivated - they have to eat. They are motivated to eat when hungry, or when the food is amazing!

1.) Stop 'free-feeding' your dog. Put meals down for only 10 minutes - and take up the bowl again if your dog doesn't eat the full portion. Free Feeding our dogs may be convenient, it will make training this way a lot harder. Your dog will be satiated since he can access food to nibble when he wants. It's best that our dogs are motivated to eat, and that the food comes through us as reinforcement for behaviors we are training.

2.) Consider the 'value' of the treats you are using. Many store-bought or commercial dog treats are full of fillers, and very little real ingredients and are not always very interesting for dogs. Having an interesting and tasty treat for your training is always important, but it may be even more necessary to your particular dog.

When working on a NEW skill or behavior, or when taking your training to a more distracting environment, you may find that the usual treat no longer works, as the skill is too hard, or the dog is feeling too emotional. Try a new, higher value treat in those situations. I recommend REAL meats - the higher the meat content, the more likely your dog is to value the treat, and work hard to earn it.

3.) Plan your training sessions when your dog is likely to be most interested in food. There is no point trying to feed your dog treats, if he has just eaten his full meal - he is not likely to want to eat more food if he is satiated, and may not be motivated to earn treats at those times of the day. If you are planning to train at 830am, give him only a small portion of his meal at 8am.

4.) Consider the challenge of the training or counterconditioning etc. Sometimes, the challenge can simply be too much, and the dog is frustrated or feeling emotional because the training session is too intense for the dog.

5.) Keep the treats VERY small. The size of 1/2 of your pinky finger. For example, a single weiner should yield about 80-100 treats! 1 hot dog = 1 session. (cut length wise, cut each piece lengthwise again, then cut into tiny pieces)

6.) As long as you are using healthy, real foods in your training session, deduct the calories your dog gets in training sessions, from their daily food allowance. If your dog LOVES his everyday kibble or meals, use a portion of the allowance in your training sessions. This will ensure you are not over-feeding your dog.

Note: Your dog will not starve himself, nor is it necessary, or healthy, to have a lot of weight on your dog. In a healthy weight dog, you should see your dog's waist when looking down over his back. And, you should be able to run your hands along his sides, feeling his ribs easily, without having to press in on his body. Overweight dogs tend to feel much less interested in training for treats. Food drive will likely increase when your overweight dog loses weight. Speak to your veterinarian.