

Free Feeding is Costly!



Food is sustenance; it keeps us alive, it fuels our activities, but for most of us it is emotional comfort. Food can trigger wonderful memories of family gatherings, or console us when we're sick or upset, so no wonder we want to show our love for our pets with food. And it behoves us not to set down a big bowl of "love" so our pets can graze all day long.

The problem is that pets, such as our dogs do not equate food with love; they don't respect you for leaving the food bowl down all day and they won't approve of you one way or another. All these things make you feel better about yourself, but it does nothing to enhance your relationship, provide good care or enrichment for your four-legged best friends, and in fact causes a lot of damage in many ways.

When we leave food down all day, we tend to create a "fussy" eater who doesn't need to finish all the food, because it's always there. This lack of "enthusiasm" causes a knee-jerk response from most dog-parents, who try to entice the dog into eating by adding table scraps and or changing the dog's food to another brand, constantly.

Also, dogs who are not on a strict feeding schedule can't eliminate when they need to, causing all sorts of discomfort when they have to "potty" at irregular times and no one is around to walk them. Some dogs of course, just soil their crates or the house causing "housebreaking" issues which often times is the reason the poor dog is shipped off to a shelter and euthanized.

Dogs who eat whenever they want are more difficult to motivate (train) because positive reinforcement methods rely on valuable reinforcers (i.e., treats, kibble, table scraps...anything the dog finds satisfying). Without motivation you cannot train, unless you resort to traditional methods which require pain and intimidation, and that's not showing the dog love!

Dogs who are not "enthused" about food are often sick, but if the pet-parent is used to a dog that refuses food, sometimes an underlying illness can go undetected and even resulting in death because such an obvious symptom had been ignored.

Pet-parents who complain that their dog doesn't listen and or labels them hard to train willful, stubborn, defiant, not food motivated etc. are missing out on a very important training principle: *He who controls the dog's resources, controls the dog!* When you have everything the dog wants, it is so easy then to give the dog (food, treats, toys, playtime, walks etc) for a little something in exchange for a behavior like sitting politely, for example.

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When a dog has a “job to do”, it is key to your dog’s mental and emotional health. By working for resources either through training, extracting food from a “puzzle toy” or problem-solving hunting or tracking activities, your dog’s brain is stimulated, enriched and satisfied. A dog, however, who engages in “mindless” food-bowl eating, especially a bowl that is present all day, is not stimulated, nor is he bonding with you and if you have enrolled him in fun sports or training classes, the very activity that should bring the dog such pleasure by tapping into his problem solving behaviors has been unwittingly sabotaged by the pet-parent who leaves food in a bowl all day!!!

Dr. Ian Dunbar, veterinary behaviorist and author, states in a chapter from his book, *After You Get Your Puppy* *Without a doubt, regularly feeding a new puppy (or adult dog) from a bowl is the single most disastrous mistake in dog husbandry and training. Although unintentional, the effects of bowl-feeding are often severely detrimental for the puppy's household manners and sense of well-being. In a sense, each bowl-fed meal steals the puppy's raison d'etre, its very reason for being.*

In other words, food-bowl feeding, especially when the food is left down all day, is a mindless behavior that robs the dog of the very pleasures that pet-parents think they’re providing!

Be the best pet-parent you can be and stop the “free feeding”; it’s costly to your relationship, your dog’s wellbeing, and it could cost him his life!

Be fair

Be kind

Be aware of what you are doing