

Treating Fido Right

We all love to offer our animal companions treats and snacks, but how many we give and how often can have more than a little impact on both their behavior and total health.

By Lucy Postins

As a general rule of thumb, it is best to limit “snacks” (free mini-meals) to once a day, if at all. A good time to snack would be right before bedtime after going potty, or as a peace offering and food-based distraction when you leave the house and Fido’s going to spend a little time alone. Good examples of snacks include a couple of tablespoons of plain yogurt, a very small portion of his regular food or a juicy, meaty bone to gnaw on, which also cleans the teeth.

Perfect departure-based snacks are something that will last longer and take Fido’s mind off being left alone. Stuffing food into an interactive toy (such as those from Kong, [LEFT, www.kong-company.com](http://www.kong-company.com)) can make it extra interesting. Homemade and other soft foods such as dehydrated mixes work really well for this and can be frozen to prolong the fun even more.

For treats (cookies or other goodies fed in individual morsels), the best approach is the Nothing in Life is Free (NLF) rule. This means you do not just walk up and give a treat for doing nothing—unless of course you are working on behavior modification, and “doing nothing” is the behavior you are specifically looking for. Request a behavior that Fido is required to perform in order to receive his treat or reward. It could be as simple as “sit” or a more complex sequence of tricks, and the reward can be adjusted to suit the level of difficulty.

Using the NLF program helps to reinforce your position as the leader of the pack and is an excellent way to practice certain behav-

iors. Instead of walking up to Fido and asking him to sit or shake a paw, try calling him to you for extra reinforcement of his recall, too.

How many treats are too many? It depends on the individual animal. For a younger pup or adolescent dog, treating is more frequent because the goal is to imprint certain behaviors in his mind and keep all experiences fun and rewarding. Keep the treats really tiny and varied to avoid over-indulging or filling up too much between meals and causing weight gain.

Treats can be surprisingly calorie-dense, and excessive treating throughout the day (especially by multiple members of one household) can pack on the pounds around Fido’s midriff in a surprisingly short time. Not only do highly overweight dogs look unsightly, but dogs that are not lean experience many more health concerns including diabetes, heart conditions and joint problems as well as a shorter life expectancy, overall.

Treats and snacks are a wonderful way to reinforce your connection with your pet. They are a way to show love and are useful as something for Fido to earn by exhibiting behavior that makes you happy. Remembering the simple rules of snacking which are treating in moderation, not offering treats for “free” and using healthy options instead of poor quality treats, will help Fido stay healthy, happy and well behaved, too! [!\[\]\(d3102649f02e825ddb76dc3de0190154_img.jpg\)](#)

Lucy Postins is a companion animal nutritionist and founder of the Honest Kitchen, a natural pet food company in San Diego, CA. www.thehonestkitchen.com.

tipbit



Happy Birthday to Fido

By Puppy Cake

Give Fido a little something to look forward to this winter (or his next birthday) with a doggie cake mix. www.puppcake.com



Diabetic & Arthritis Relief Treats

By Old Dog Cookie Company

Old Dog Cookie Company products are made with all natural and herbal-based ingredients to promote wellness. Their Diabetic treats are specially formulated to help a dog better regulate blood sugar levels and the Arthritis Relief cookies are designed to help maintain optimal joint function. www.olddogcookie.com



Just Chicken

By Ameri-Treats

Handmade treats from 100% white meat chicken breast, raised right here in the USA and roasted to perfection. No bones, fat, skin, salts, oils, chemicals or fillers added of any kind. Your dogs and cats will love them! www.ameritreats.com

TREATS AND SNACKS ARE A WONDERFUL WAY TO REINFORCE YOUR CONNECTION WITH YOUR PET.

Healthy Treat

Many commercial treats are loaded with sugar, chemical preservatives, colorings, by-products and allergy-causing grains like wheat, corn and soy. Aim to keep Fido trim by limiting treats, making him work for them and using healthy “people foods” or natural treats such as those below.

Use raw baby carrots, diced up chicken or tiny pieces of cheese for training sessions in place of commercial treats—but remember to never treat Fido with grapes, raisins, candies or chocolate.

Top quality treats include those from Zukes (Mini Naturals are really tiny and ideal for training sessions). Or try making your own—*Made out of Love* (available from www.thehonestkitchen.com) is a cookbook with recipes for healthy brownies, training bites and other treats that are infused with a little personal love.