

## TIPS FOR DEALING WITH A FUSSY DOG

Having a fussy dog can be SUPER frustrating, especially when you are excited to get new fresh foods into their diet. Hopefully this guide will help you.

It is super important to keep in mind that the techniques mentioned are for a healthy ADULT dog void of any medical issues. If your dog has a medical issue, consult with your veterinarian. Any techniques that involve playing or fun can be applied to all dogs, especially puppies.

### WHY IS YOUR DOG FUSSY?

The first step to working on fussiness is to work out WHY your dog is fussy in the beginning the first place. Consider these questions:

- When did the fussiness begin?
- Is it a certain food?
- Have you noticed any patterns in fussiness as a result of texture or way the food is presented? Eg diced up, whole, minced, hot, cold, frozen?
- Has fussiness been created by your dog having a bad experience with that food? Eg. The last time they had that food they had an upset tummy.
- Is it a learnt behaviour?
- Does feeding time make you anxious or uncomfortable?

### CERTAIN FOODS ARE THE ISSUE:

Some dogs may not like a particular food as it may be too rich for them, the smell isn't appealing or the last time they ate that food it upset their tummy.

If this is the case, try using a very small amount of the food presented in a different way. So if you gave them whole diced liver, try mincing it and mixing small amounts of it in with other food you KNOW they love.

Some tips:

- Mix it up and space it out. If your dog has success and eats more of the specific food, don't assume your problem is solved. Space out when you offer the food and change the way it is presented.
- Increase the amount of new food GRADUALLY.
- Mix with molds of foods they like. Eg. Mix liver with berries.

If you suspect your dog previously had an upset tummy the last time they ate the food, then you may need to work out why that happened. Do they have a sensitivity to that specific food? Has it happened prior? How was the food presented?

You can try to change the way the food was presented and include very small amounts with foods you know they like.

### DOES FEEDING TIME MAKE YOU NERVOUS?

This is seriously an issue for a lot of people! If your dog has been fussy a lot of its life, feeding time can be stressful. Especially when you have a dog that you NEED to feed. Our emotions affect our dogs, in fact they can actually SMELL our fear and worries (Don't believe me, check out the link at the bottom of this document).

Knowing this means that our feelings could be affecting our dogs and they may be getting anxious too. As Mike from Married At First Sight Australia would say "I am not your therapist, this isn't therapy" and that's partially true, if you are seriously uncomfortable about meal time, perhaps consult with someone who can help you understand why that is.

### TRY MAKING DINNER TIME FUN

Have you considered making dinner time a game? I often encourage my clients to engage in toy play and then rush to the bowl where a SUPER small amount of food is there and encourage the dog to eat it by saying GETTTT IT!!

You can also try using puzzles and Kongs to deliver food. Remember, if your dog is prone to becoming disinterested in toys, it means that they don't know how to do and give up! This means that you may actually show your dog how to win.

Training is also a great way to feed dinner. Check out this awesome eBook by Absolute Dogs which covers using your dinner as a way to build confidence and work on your relationship:

<https://game.absolute-dogs.com/mc-ditch-the-bowl>

### IS FUSSINESS A LEARNT BEHAVIOUR? ... and is it our fault?

The answer is YES and YES. Fussiness can be created because we have TAUGHT our dogs to be fussy. How? Let me give you an example:

We offer Fluffy food A in bowl.

Fluffy turns up his nose. We think "hmm okay I'll try food B as Fluffy has eaten food B"

Fluffy sniffs and walks away. We panic and decide to see if Fluffy will eat his favourite food C, because he may be sick.

Fluffy EATS food C. HOORAY.

Now, when night 2,3 and 4 rolls around, the same thing happens and we keep offering multiple food options until Fluffy's favourite food is presented. During this process, Fluffy becomes predictive and starts predicting that the behaviour chain that happens that two times the bowl goes down, he does a behaviour (walks away) and then his favourite option arrives.

Two things are happening here:

1) Fluffy is learning a behaviour chain. Just like when you hear owners say SIT, SIT, SIT, FLUFFY SIT. And the dog sits. The dog is sitting on the 4<sup>th</sup> time you say it because on the fourth rep you are serious and enforce it. (Did you just rethink your training? #sorrynotsorry)

2) You are reinforcing Fluffy for walking away. For example: Say you are a good trainer and you say sit and Fluffy sits, what do you do? Provide a treat/reward to say GOOD JOB, you did it, that is what I want. Now if Fluffy finds food C rewarding and valuable, when he walks away and you provide that, what have you just done? REINFORCED IT.

HOW DO WE BREAK THIS CYCLE?

To break this cycle, it is pretty simple. Offer food A, allow the dog 15 minutes to eat it. If they don't, remove it and offer it at their next meal. Between removing the food and their next meal, DO NOT FEED THEM.

If they do not eat at their second meal, remove the food and try again at their next meal. If they are still eating after 15 minutes, don't remove the bowl.

If you are a person that leaves kibble out all day for your dog to graze, this will need to stop immediately. Why? Because there is a chance your dog is not hungry.

You may be asking, won't they starve? The answer is nope, your dog can actually last 3-5 days with not food and some even 7. Water however is critical. Vets actually suggest fasting your dog for 24 hours if they get sick in some cases. If your dog is

hungry, they will eat; providing you are positive they did not get sick from the food and all the other points in this document are covered.

\*\* It's important to remember that this is a GUIDE only. Every dog is different. You are responsible for your own dog.

Links to studies about dogs smelling fear:

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2150956-dogs-really-can-smell-your-fear-and-then-they-get-scared-too/>

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10071-017-1139-x>

<https://www.iflscience.com/plants-and-animals/dogs-really-can-smell-our-fear-but-it-makes-them-scared-too/>