



The Power of Cookies

Tasty treats decrease FAS and frustration and help shelter animals feed good! This handout provides tips on choosing and using treats for behavior modification and training with dogs and cats.

General tips

- ✓ Food is by far the best and easiest reward we can use for most dogs and cats!
- ✓ Always have a variety of treats available because animals have different preferences.
- ✓ Experiment to figure out which treats hold a particular animal's interest. Those that they really LOVE will be your high-value treats for that animal.
- ✓ For animals experiencing a high level of FAS, extra special treats are often needed in order to overcome their negative emotions.
- ✓ Keep a pouch to carry treats in while you are working: a fanny pack, carpenter's apron, or a treat bag (available at pet stores and online). Pants or a scrub top with large pockets can work, too.

Treat suggestions for dogs

- Slices of hot dog or string cheese (high value!)
- Cheese balls, popcorn, or Cheerios cereal (great for tossing)
- Pup-Peroni treats (easy to break into small pieces and do not crumble)
- Tiny dog biscuits such as Milk Bone Minis or other hard treats
- Freeze-dried liver

Treat suggestions for cats

- Canned tuna or chicken (high value!)
- Canned cat food such as Fancy Feast or Meow Mix
- Pounce, Temptations, Friskies or similar treats
- Freeze-dried liver

Treat size and texture

- Choose soft treats that are easy to chew and swallow rapidly.
- Treats that break into small pieces without crumbling are ideal. Crumbs may cause the pet may focus on finding crumbs instead of YOU.
- Treats should be very small – the size of a pea or smaller for most dogs and cats. Pets view a larger treat as one treat. But, the same treat broken into 2 pieces will be perceived as 2 treats!



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Lickable, longer-lasting treats

- Peanut butter (Be sure to get peanut butter that is free of xylitol, an artificial sweetener that is toxic to dogs and cats. Most common store brands are xylitol free, including Jif, Skippy, and Peter Pan.)
- Soft, spreadable cheese—such as canned squeeze cheese or cream cheese (Most cats love these as much as dogs do!)
- Meat broth frozen in a small paper cup (This is the perfect treat for pets that are being fasted prior to anesthesia / spay-neuter surgery.)

Treat buckets

Treat buckets use the “Power of Cookies” to create positive associations with people outside the pet’s kennel or cage and reward calm, friendly behavior at the front.

Treat bucket setup

1. Buy small stainless steel buckets to hang on the outside of the kennel or cage.
2. Stock the buckets daily with dry, nonperishable treats such as kibble, mini biscuits, other small, dry treats, or freeze-dried liver.
3. Place a sign on or beside each bucket to inform everyone what to do: “Please toss me a treat so it lands at my feet!”
4. Sanitize the buckets on a weekly basis, or more often if needed.

For friendly animals that greet you readily:

1. Use treats to reward calm, friendly behaviors. For example, wait for a dog to stop jumping or barking and then toss him a treat and tell him what a good boy he is!
2. Be positive, predictable, considerate, and consistent! All shelter staff and volunteers should learn how to reward good behavior with treats, and to ignore undesirable or unruly behavior.

For shy and reactive animals

1. Walk by and toss a treat. Do not stop, stare, or linger in front. Only progress to the next step once the pet readily eats the tossed treat and remains calmly at the front.
2. Walk by, toss a treat, and stop for 1-2 seconds while standing sideways. Do not stare, then move away. Only progress to the next step once the pet readily eats the tossed treat and remains calmly at the front.
3. Walk by, toss a treat, stop for 2-3 seconds, while standing sideways. Do not stare. Talk to the pet in gentle, soothing tone, then move away. Only progress to the next step once the pet readily eats the tossed treat and remains calmly at the front.
4. Walk up to animal, standing sideways, and stop. *This time, talk to the pet, but refrain from tossing treats right away.* Do not stare. After a couple of seconds, toss several treats, one after the next while continuing to talk to



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the pet in a gentle, soothing tone. Then, move away. Only progress to the next step once the pet readily eats the tossed treats and remains calmly at the front.

5. Gradually increase the amount of time you stop and engage with the pet before you toss treats. Success! The power of cookies has reduced FAS and the animal now has a positive association with people at their cage front!

Note: For pets that refuse dry treats, use higher value treats. If they are perishable, you will not be able to leave them in the treat buckets, but you can walk by and toss them at intervals throughout the day.

How to explain the importance of treats to others

Some shelters discourage or even ban the use of treats for dogs and cats because they are concerned about stomach upset and diarrhea. But, treats are one of the most important tools for a Fear Free shelter. Use these points to help everyone understand that using treats is essential to the well-being of shelter animals.

1. Food is a POWERFUL form of enrichment, and there is no doubt that treats or other delicious foods increase the value of food enrichment. We all love treats! Something as simple as having a treat every day at 3:00 can have a positive impact on the emotional health and welfare of shelter animals.
2. The use of food in training and behavior modification is essential. Hands down, highly palatable food treats are the best way to motivate pets to behave as we would like them to (by making the treats contingent on behaviors we desire). It is also the best way to create positive associations with people and other scary things in the shelter (classical conditioning). There is simply no substitute for the use of highly palatable food in a shelter training and behavior modification program. In short, it is essential for humane care in a shelter setting.
3. Working or volunteering in a shelter day in and day out can be both physically and emotionally challenging. Staff and volunteers need to be able to do something nice for the pets on a regular basis. Giving pets treats is not only good for the pets, it is also good for the people who do it!
4. If dietary indiscretion is a concern, use particular brands of treats or particular foods. You will still need to have a few options available, but by keeping the types of available treats consistent, you will help prevent gastrointestinal upset. Let donors know the types of treats you use so that they can donate these and help keep the shelter well stocked. Institute a system where animals that have already received a lot of treats for one day have a tag on their run or cage that denotes they have received lots of treats today – and to please treat another pet. This will prevent one pet from getting too many treats in one day that could exacerbate a GI upset.
5. Treats are certainly not the most common cause of diarrhea in shelter pets. If there are animals with diarrhea in the shelter, consult a veterinarian experienced in the practice of shelter medicine to diagnose the cause and treat accordingly.