

Guilt Free Eating: How to keep your dog from begging at the table.

By Wendy van Kerkhove – Fresh Air Training
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Are you constantly pushing your dog's paws off of the edge of the table while you are eating dinner? Do you feel guilty watching those soulful eyes looking up at you as you cut your steak? You don't have to live this way. It's time to take control of your dining experience!

Dogs operate under one principle – Try something, if the outcome is good, do it again, if the outcome is bad, don't do it again and if the outcome is neutral, keep trying until you've gathered more information. Dogs do what works – for them, not for us! If you occasionally cave in and allow begging to pay off, you've taught your dog that if he just keeps trying the outcome will be positive. Think of it as sitting at a slot machine that pays off just enough for you to keep pulling the lever instead of moving to the next machine.

The entire notion of not feeding dogs "human food" is kind of ridiculous. Usually the first ingredient on a bag of dog food is a meat product – chicken, lamb etc. The fact that it's mixed with a bunch of other products and turned into a little brown pellet doesn't take away from the fact that it's still chicken.

True, feeding your dog from the dinner table is a big no-no. Not because your dog shouldn't get to eat human food but rather because you are setting a bad precedent. Many people feed their dogs table scraps and don't have a begging issue because the scraps are always given in the dog's food bowl.

If you want to eliminate begging at the table try this: Use your dog's leash as a tether and secure it to an immovable object, preferably within sight of the dining room table. Place your dog's bed in the "tether zone" and before you sit down for dinner give him a really good bone/bully stick/rawhide to chew on while you eat. After days of using this technique you'll soon start to notice that as dinner is ready to be served, your dog automatically goes and lies down on his bed. Just remember that you must give your dog something of good enough value that he chooses to lie down and eat it rather than straining on the leash and barking and whining at you.

The general rule of thumb for solving most unwanted behaviors is to first, prevent the behavior from happening and secondly, give the dog an acceptable alternative. There are other methods, such as teaching your dog to "down-stay" for the entire meal, but is a long, laborious process. For the average human and the average dog, fixing the

problem as easy as possible is the way to go! So next time you are faced with a behavior challenge, think prevention and redirection and you'll be good as gold!

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