



## What to do about Fussy Eaters

MORUYA VETERINARY HOSPITAL

02 44742532

### **Veterinary Checkup**

If your dog has developed the habit of being picky about what he eats, the first step to a solution is to have a healthcheck. This is especially important if the finicky eating has developed suddenly, is accompanied by vomiting and/or diarrhoea, your dog is showing other signs of illness, or the finicky eating is associated with weight loss. A health check will help rule out any underlying medical conditions, such as gastrointestinal or oral disease, that may be causing the fussy eating.

### **The Food**

If your dog receives a clean bill of health, the next step is to evaluate the food you feed.

You should be feeding a high-quality, nutritionally balanced diet that will eliminate the need for diet variety. Dogs do not need or particularly like variety in their meals like humans.

Consistently feed one type of food. Constantly changing foods may cause your dog to hold out for something tastier, creating a fussy eater. Change can also cause vomiting and diarrhea in some dogs. Feeding human food snacks can have the same effect and can also lead to obesity.

Premium brands of foods typically have less fillers (grains etc) so the food is more nutritionally dense than supermarket brands. This means that the dog needs to eat a smaller amount to feel full and satisfied.

### **Your role in your dogs fussy habits**

How do you respond when your dog refuses to eat? Do you pet him, console him, hand-feed him etc? If you are giving your dog positive reinforcements when he is being fussy, he may avoid eating until he gets the extra attention he desires.

One common method for feeding fussy dogs is that you put the food in your dogs bowl, and walk away. When your dog is hungry, he will instinctively eat for nourishment. Do not turn mealtime into a bargain for attention.

You could try putting your dog in a separate room to have dinner (the same time as you are having yours is ideal) after 20 minutes take the bowl away, whether he has eaten or not. When he learns that dinner is over and no more food is forthcoming, he may be more inclined to eat. This will only work if no more food is offered and no treats given between meals.

Keep your dog food and people food separate. Your dog should only eat food out of his bowl, and should never see food as coming from your plate or from something you're preparing for yourself.

Are you able to provide your dog with routine? Most dogs prefer routine. Do you feed him at relatively the same time each day? Unpredictable feeding times may be stressful to your dog and his gastrointestinal system.

With smaller breeds, the amount of food needed to keep them healthy may be very little, a couple of small treats during the day may stop your dog from being sufficiently hungry enough to consume a proper meal at dinner time.

Reserve treats for times when praise is necessary, such as in training. Remember, not all rewards have to be edible, if your dog loves attention, a scratch behind the ears is a treat.

If you find that food treats get the best results, set some boundaries, for instance, only give a treat after a trick, and always do it in the backyard.

### **Other food sources**

Closely observe your pets' day. Is there any chance he is eating something other than his dog food? Is a family member slipping him scraps from the table? Is your dog munching on faeces in the yard? Is he getting into the rubbish bin? Is a neighbour giving him snacks when he is outside? Perhaps another food source is preventing him from being hungry at mealtime.

You should also be sure your dog isn't being fed his lunch and dinner by more than one member of the family, or regularly receiving treats from everyone between meals. Be sure everyone knows their role in feeding, so that your dog is not consuming more than he needs.

### **The naturally fussy eater**

Some dogs are just...naturally finicky. Here are some tips to help you deal with these dogs.

\* If you have been feeding your dog's current food for an extended period of time, he has always been fussy about eating it, and you feel that he is unhappy with the taste, then you could gradually change him to a new quality food. To do this, mix the old food in with small amounts of the new food, then slowly increase the new food and decrease the old. This will prevent gastrointestinal upset. Make the change over at least 3 days.

\* When changing foods, pick a new flavour or texture that may better suit his desires. You may want to try feeding a semi-moist vs dry, for example or you may choose lamb and rice rather than beef and rice. Keep in mind if selecting a softer food, these foods can cause more tartar build-up on your dogs' teeth, and they are generally more expensive. Adding small amounts of a moist food may be a better alternative to completely switching.

\* Another way to help fussy dogs to eat is heating up the food to just above room temperature. You might try microwaving moist food, or adding hot water to dry food.