



**CLINICAL ANIMAL
BEHAVIOURIST & TRAINER**
Nurturing Pet & Owner Relationships



INFORMATION SHEET

THE RULE OF 1/3S

HOW TO USE FOOD EFFECTIVELY

When you fill your pet's bowl for breakfast consider how each and every piece of kibble could be used instead to reward a behaviour you really like. For every meal that's served in a bowl, it is also a missed opportunity to entertain your dog. When we reward behaviours, we increase the likelihood of these being repeated. So, let's use food strategically. Here is how...

The Rule of 1/3s for food

- 1/3 of all daily calorie intake through training
- 1/3 of all daily calorie intake through food toys/games (e.g.) Kong, snuffle mat, Buster cube, scatter feeding etc
- 1/3 of all daily calorie intake through a food bowl

Following these rules, you maximise opportunities to reinforce desirable behaviours, reduce fasting, direct your dog's mouth onto appropriate items, and lower frustration-related behaviours (e.g. barking, jumping, grabbing).

Utilising 1/3 of food via enrichment toys, scatter feeding, and making your own toys also channels energy positively. Moreover, chewing and biting onto food toys promotes serotonin release: a key hormone that stabilises mood, feelings of well-being, and happiness. You can also pair food toys with other environmental cues such as calming music, pheromone therapy (e.g. Dog Appeasing Pheromone plug-ins), making for a more contented dog, and encouraging independence. Food toys are also for reinforcing calmness around triggers for high arousal, such as visitor arrivals and predictable noise events, such as the daily post delivery and so on.

Using the Rule of 1/3s you can reward at high frequency during short training sessions, and for low octane activities such as scent-work which reduces arousal and builds confidence - perfect when introducing new experiences to your pet.

Avoid leaving a food bowl down all day unless instructed by your vet, as this lowers the power of your dog's food used for training, and can lead to 'fussy eating'.

FOOD ENRICHMENT TOY IDEAS

There are numerous food toys available, as well as make-your-own ideas. See below for some of my favourites.

Commercial toys

- The classic Kong (pink/boy for puppies, red/black for adult teeth)
- Lickee mat
- Zogoflex Toppl treat toy
- Snuffle mat
- Lotus ball
- Kong wobbler
- Lickee mat wobble
- Chomp 'n' chase
- Trixie snack snake

Make-your-own

- Carrot kebabs - raw carrot pieces are skewed along non-dyed garden string
- Toilet roll treats - place some dried food into the roll, fold the ends inwards and squash together
- Cardboard boxes - pack with newspaper/packing paper & hide kibble/treats amongst the layers. Close up the box and pierce some holes to let out the scent

Top Tips

1. Layer your food toys so they have different food stuffs in them and are well-packed. This helps drive motivation and bides you some peace & quiet!
2. Many puppies get frustrated by food toys as they lack patience to 'work' at the food. If your dog is leaving their food toy, hold it at an angle to their mouth - your hand will act like a tool, helping their tongue reach into the hole.
Consider purchasing the next size up, so the hole is bigger, making it easier for their tongue to reach into.