

You Are What You Treat

Wandering the aisles at pet stores and box stores leaves most pet owners overwhelmed by the selection. Natural treats, chewable treats, jerky treats, bones, rawhides, pig's ears, and more, available to the owner longing to spoil their pets with the best of the best. Which to choose? Avoid? Can owners do treats at home, say from the kitchen or dining room table?

The best way to avoid causing your pet to gain weight with treats is to **scoop out your dog's allotment of dog food** for the day, and take a bit from that each time you want to reward your pet. For example, if your dog gets two cups of food twice a day, retain about a half cup of this for the day's treats. This way your pet's caloric intake stays within the desired range, and they get little "bonus" treats throughout the day.

If non-dog-food treats are what you desire, then it is important to discuss how MUCH is appropriate to treat. Many owners associate treats with showing love for their pet, giving a treat when they leave for work and more when they return, as well as several throughout the day. However, treats should only make up **10% of your pet's caloric intake** for the day, which can add up fast. For example, a typical ten pound dog should only need about 300 calories a day, meaning only about 30 calories should come from treats. Two slices of ham have 70 calories, over two times the calories allotted for treats for a ten pound dog! A small (6.7 oz) rawhide bone has almost 700 calories! If you look at a rawhide bone versus the equivalent in donuts to humans, you have given your pet 10 donuts! Give your pet lots of attention to save it from becoming overweight.

What about treats for training? Many trainers have found that dogs and puppies respond better to their **favorite toy or attention** from their master. Once the desired behavior has been displayed, reward your pet with their favorite toy or game, such as tug-o-war or their stuffed bear, or an incredible ear rub and happy, proud voice. Your dog's primary desire is to please his or her master!

What kind or kinds of treats should be avoided? The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) has received reports of severe illness and death of pets related to jerky pet treats. Though most complaints involve treats imported from China, they caution that any jerky treat can have ingredients imported from China. Until the source of the illnesses is identified, **avoiding jerky treats** is the best option.

Jerky treats are not alone among the treats that may have dangerous side effects; rawhides and bones can also cause problems in pets. Rawhides tend to break apart into chunks, leading to **gastrointestinal obstructions** which often can only be removed with surgery. Ham bones tend to be harder than teeth, and can result in painful broken teeth as well as obstructions when pieces of the bones break off.

Table scraps, such as bits of meat or cheese or bread, are incredibly high in calories. For example, one ounce of cheese is 120 calories, and 1.7 ounces of bread is 130 calories. Instead of giving tasty treats from your meals, put some of their dog food on the edge of your plate and treat them with this instead. Since **table scraps are high in fat** for our companions, many can develop pancreatitis from getting too much of a good thing. This is a painful disease that can cause vomiting and diarrhea, often requiring hospitalization.

If jerky treats, rawhides, bones, and table scraps are to be avoided, what treats are best? To avoid weight gain in pets, try giving your dog **baby carrots or canned green beans** as treats. These have less calories and are often well-liked by dogs. To keep your pet busy while you are away, try getting the

treat-stuffing toys such as those made by Kong (the black ones are especially hard to destroy!). Instead of filling these toys with treats, wet down their meals and fill up the toy, then freeze it to keep your pet occupied for hours!

According to a 2015 study, **more than half** of our nation's dogs and cats are overweight. To avoid weight gain and possibly achieve weight loss, avoid over-treating your pets (this includes table scraps!) and try giving them extra attention instead. Using treats from your dog's daily allotment of dog food is the best way to give them little rewards throughout the day without contributing to our nation's overweight pet problem.

Healthy Pumpkin Balls (Cesar's Way)

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup canned pumpkin puree
- 4 tbsp molasses
- 4 tbsp water
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 cups whole wheat flour
- ¼ tsp baking soda
- ¼ tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp cinnamon (optional)

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees
2. Mix pumpkin, molasses, vegetable oil, and water together in a bowl
3. Add the whole wheat flour, baking soda, baking powder and cinnamon to the mixture and stir until dough softens
4. Scoop out small spoonfuls of dough and roll into balls on your hands (wet hands work best)
5. Set the balls onto a lightly greased cookie sheet and flatten with a fork
6. Bake approximately 25 minutes until dough is hardened

Apple Crunch Pupcakes (Cesar's Way)

Ingredients

- 2 ¾ cups water
- ¼ cup applesauce (unsweetened)
- 2 tbsp honey
- 1/8 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 medium egg
- 4 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 cup dried apple chips (unsweetened)
- 1 tbsp baking powder

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees
2. Mix water, applesauce, honey, egg, and vanilla together in a bowl
3. Add remaining ingredients and mix until well blended
4. Pour into lightly greased muffin pans
5. Bake 1 ¼ hours

Peanut Butter and Pumpkin Dog Treats (Kelly, AllRecipes.com)

Ingredients

- 2 1/2 cups whole wheat flour
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup canned pumpkin
- 2 tbsp peanut butter (NO XYLITOL)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. Whisk together the flour, eggs, pumpkin, peanut butter, salt, and cinnamon in a bowl. Add water as needed to help make the dough workable, but the dough should be dry and stiff. Roll the dough into a 1/2-inch-thick roll. Cut into 1/2-inch pieces.
3. Bake in preheated oven until hard, about 40 minutes.

Store your homemade dog treats in an airtight container and place them in the freezer. Allow the treat to thaw for 10 – 20 minutes prior to serving to your dog. Treats can last for up to 6 months in the freezer.