

Feeding options



FOREVER HOUNDS TRUST

Matching greyhounds and lurchers to happy homes

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Feeding Time

When it comes to deciding on how to feed your dog, there are lots of different options to consider. Some of these include feeding meals in a plastic bowl, using raised feeding bowls and food puzzles. The choice is yours and, more importantly, down to your dog's individual needs and what they enjoy.

Food bowls

It is worth considering the material that the food bowl is made of and the practicalities of mealtimes. Food bowls are available in a range of materials from stainless steel, plastic to ceramic.

Ceramic bowls are often heavier and more difficult to knock over than plastic or stainless steel, but they are breakable. Stainless steel bowls are very easy to clean but, sometimes, the noise of a dog's ID tag clinking on the bowl can be off putting for some dogs. Plastic bowls are lightweight but may be tipped over easily or can be chewed.

For some dogs eating and drinking from a raised food bowl is a more comfortable option than trying to reach a bowl on the floor.



Concerns about using raised food bowls stem from research into bloat. Bloat, also known as gastric dilatation-volvulus (GDV), is a condition which can affect deep-chested breeds, causing an excess of gas to accumulate in the stomach, resulting in the stomach swelling(dilating) and then twisting on itself. This is a serious condition and if you ever notice signs or symptoms of this in your dog you should call your vet immediately.

Studies into the causes of bloat have not found a conclusive reason for the condition, but have established key risk factors which include:

- Breed-type (NB: Greyhounds have not been referenced in available studies)
- Genetics (if there is a history of bloat in the breeding lines)
- Feeding only one daily meal
- Speed of eating, particularly if the dog eats very quickly

Many hounds eat regularly from raised feeding bowls without any problems. However, if you are not keen on using raised bowls, or would rather use mealtimes as further interaction or stimulation opportunities for your dog, then there are many other options for feeding daily meals.

It is possible to feed your dog without ever using a food bowl!

If you feed kibble (dry dog food) there are lots of ways you can turn mealtimes into fun activity or training time for your dog. Make sure that you choose options that are suitable for your individual dog(s). For example, if they are worried about people or other dogs near their food, there are still a lot of activities you can choose that allow them to eat in their own space, or if your dog struggles with confidence to try new things help them out and build up to more difficult games over time.

Options include:

- Food puzzles – we have provided more information on these below.
- Using kibble for training treats – if your dog enjoys their food, you can use a portion of their daily meal to reward behaviours you want to encourage, or for fun training sessions to learn new tricks.
- Scatter feeding – you can throw the kibble around the garden lawn or an indoor room and let your dog seek it out with his/her nose.

There are so many different games and food puzzles that you can offer a different activity every day of the week if you wish! This helps to keep your dog mentally stimulated, teaches them how to problem solve and gives them confidence to try new things.

Types of food puzzles

The advantages of using food puzzles to feed your dog include:

- Provides your dog with environmental enrichment
- Can help slow down fast eaters
- Provides your dog with an outlet for mental stimulation
- Helps make your dog 'work' for their food
- Helps prevent boredom
- Taps into your dog's natural instincts
- Can provide exercise

Slow feeders: If your dog tends to gobble their food in seconds, there are puzzles that are specifically designed to slow your dog down. These include food mazes and slow feeders.



Interactive food puzzles:

You can help your dog put their brain to use at mealtimes by using interactive food puzzles. There are lots of interactive food puzzles to choose from, including:

- Treat balls that are designed to be rolled around for the kibble to come out.
- Kong® Wobbler which is an interactive food toy that sits upright until it is pushed by your dog's paw or nose, and then dispenses treats as it wobbles, spins and rolls.
- Snuffle mats, as the name suggests, are a great way for your dog to 'snuffle' out their food. They are generally made from a rubber mat which is intertwined with fleece strips, and your dog sniffs to find the dry food which is hidden between the fleece strips.
- Nina Ottosson games which encourage your dog to work out puzzles to release the food.

Stuffed chew toys: If you feed your dog wet food there are several rubber toys that are designed to be stuffed with food and extend meal times, or provide a 'boredom buster' for your dog. One of the most well-known of these is the Kong® Classic.

The Kong® Classic is made of durable rubber and can be stuffed with a variety of food types. The ingredients for a stuffed Kong® are only limited by your imagination and what your dog likes to eat! Remember to ensure that any foods you use are safe for dogs to eat. Once your dog is comfortable using a Kong®, you can even progress to freezing the contents, which means it takes your dog longer to eat them.



Safety first

Whenever you introduce a new method of feeding your dog, it is important that you supervise them to ensure that they can eat their meal and understand what they need to do to gain access to their food. For the first few times with any new toy or activity, you may have to show your dog what to do such as rolling the treat ball, wobbling the Kong wobbler etc.

If you are worried that your dog may chew the food puzzle, it is very important to watch them while they eat and then remove the food toy, once all the food is eaten. If your dog is worried about people or dogs near their food, be sure to choose a safe, appropriate option for their activities.

Where to buy/find out more:

There are lots of different food puzzles available and you can find out more from the following websites:

The Kong Company - <https://www.kongcompany.com/en-uk/>
Nina Ottosson food toys - <http://www.nina-ottosson.com/>
Snuffle mats - http://www.snuffelmat.nl/en_GB/

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