



June 03, 2003

Why feeding your dog a consistent diet "on time" is a bad idea...

(This article is also available as a simple [text file version](#))

Carnivores, like our dogs, are not meant to be fed on time. And they are not built to get the same food every time they eat. They are genetically programmed for *variation* - both in food composition and feeding time.

Unfortunately, our dogs are also very fast to adjust to a regular feeding schedule and to a specific food composition. This can create big trouble when you suddenly start deviating from the well-established schedule. You might see vomiting of bile and other signs of a significant decrease in wellness by simply feeding *something different* - or feeding *at a different time*.

Conditioning to a predictable feeding schedule

If you feed your dog every day at, say, 8 PM, then all organs in the body's gastrointestinal system will program themselves to start their parts of the digestion process at 8 PM. *Whether or not you feed!* (Pavlov's famous experiments about 100 years ago are the classic proof...)

So, if you suddenly introduce a fast day in the middle of a long tradition of consistent feeding at predictable times, you are doomed to create a problem for your dog! What should the dog do with all those excess digestive juices produced by the stomach at the programmed time? There is only one way: vomit them out of the system! Those juices contain strong chemicals. Without any food to neutralize them, they can hurt the stomach by starting digestive processes of the stomach tissue!

Unfortunately, many people take this kind of observation for proof that it is unhealthy for the dog to have its meals served on different times, not to mention having a healthy fast day... I hope you see why this is a terribly wrong conclusion!

Conditioning to a predictable food

Many people experience similar problems when they try to get their dog to eat some food it isn't used to. These problems particularly become apparent when you want to shift from kibble feeding to a more healthy raw natural diet.

There are many cases of this causing the dog to vomit. And the owner then, naturally, thinks that there is a problem with the raw food...

Again: Wrong conclusion.

Kibble generally consists primarily of carbohydrates from grain. More than half of the weight is carbohydrates, if not 70% or more. But grain is not even on the menu of a natural diet....

Carbohydrates can only be digested in the dog's stomach by enzymes that only function well at pH levels that are close to neutral (pH 6-7) - and thus very far from the very strong acidity (pH 1-2) required by the enzymes that digest raw meat.

When a dog has been "programmed" to expect a meal of mainly carbohydrates at, say 8 PM, then the pancreas will produce lots of those enzymes that can do the job of digesting the expected carbohydrates, and the stomach will adjust the pH level to around 6. All of this happening shortly before 8 PM every day....

But if you now instead shock the entire system by feeding raw meat instead of the expected carbohydrates, the dog cannot do anything with that great food - everything is programmed now to digest *carbohydrates*. The enzymes produced by the pancreas and other glands are the wrong ones for this food, and the pH level in the stomach is wrong. The only defense the dog has is to vomit everything and thus eliminate the problem.

The culprit is not the food, but the past feeding schedule and biologically inadequate food source.

Precautions when planning a shift to a natural diet.

Before you pull the dog through this kind of trauma, you should first erase those conditional reflexes the dog has created in response to your unnatural, regular, and predictable feeding.

It is simple. You just start varying the times you feed the "old" food. Shift the times by feeding an hour early for a few days. Then two hours early on some days, one hour early on other days, even back to the previous time once in a while - but never the same time two days in a row! In a couple of weeks, you go earlier and earlier - and, at the same time, make the time less and less predictable. If the dog wants to skip a meal, you just let it. Your goal is to feed the dog a maximum of 6 meals per week, at times it has no way of predicting.

In the beginning of this transition, *you should avoid feeding later than the predicted time* - because that would cause the dog to experience problems when you don't feed on the expected time.... If the stomach is already full when "feeding time" comes up, there will be no problem.

It does not take a lot to erase a conditional reflex like the production of stomach juices on predictable times. If it took you, say, 100 repetitions to establish the conditional reflex, it will only take 2-5 times "breaking the rule" to make it dysfunctional again. So, even if you have had your dog "programmed" over several years, it will not take more than a few days, maximum a week or two, to erase the old harmful conditioning.

Once you erased the conditional reflex of the dog's system preparing for a predictable meal, you will no longer experience problems when you shift the diet to a more healthy raw, natural diet. The dog will then no longer produce any enzymes for the expected digestion until the stomach has realized what kind of food it needs to digest - and it will no longer make wrong guesses.

Although you might see the dog salivate when exposed to the smell of some delicious food, its stomach should not start producing any production of enzymes for digestion until the food mechanically has passed the esophagus - and if you keep a non-predictable feeding schedule, it will stay that way.

The biggest benefit you get will be that the dog will increase its ability to handle the digestion of *all kinds of natural food*. By not allowing the stomach to "jump the gun" on starting the digestion process before the food actually is available for it, it remains flexible in regards to making the digestion fit the food. And that way, you keep your dog in much better health.

Mogens Eliassen

Mogens Eliassen holds a Ph.D. level degree in Chemistry from Århus University, Denmark and has 30+ years of experience working with dogs, dog owners, dog trainers, and holistic veterinarians as a coach, lecturer, and education system developer. He publishes a free newsletter "[The Peeing Post](#)" containing lots of tips and advice on dog problems of all kinds, particularly about training, behavioral problems, feeding, and health care.

For more information about Mogens Eliassen, including links to other articles he has published, please send a short e-mail to contact@k9joy.com.