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Why Your Dog Needs to Fill its Stomach on an Irregular Basis

Most dog owners, who love their dogs, try to extend as much TLC to them as they can. However, when they assume that what is good for them is also good for the dog, they make some terrible mistakes.... Dog do *not* have monkey stomachs!

Some anatomic facts to consider...

A dog stomach is elastic, like an accordion. When empty, it folds to what almost appears to be an intestine. When it is filled, it can contain as much as 7-8% of the dog's body weight! (For a human weighing 120 pounds, this would correspond to eating 10 pounds in one meal - but a human stomach is a bag with almost no elasticity - it simply cannot do more than about 10% of this...)

Further, the dog's stomach is full of small glands that produce digestive enzymes. Those glands start to work when they get in contact with food. This will happen for some of them immediately as the dog gets some food in the stomach, but, because of the folding nature of the stomach, most of those glands do not get to touch food, unless the stomach is filled so that all the folds are stretched out!

An amazing consequence of this is that the dog's digestion process is more efficient when it gets a large meal! While it still might digest a certain fraction of a small meal, that fraction will be much larger for a larger meal! Dogs that are being fed almost exclusively "full meals" (= meals that fill the stomach), generally need some 20-30% less food than dogs that are being fed many smaller meals. (This is exactly the opposite of what would be true for a human stomach...)

The ultimate carnivore experience

Dogs, like other carnivores, do not rely on having food available all the time. In fact, when they have a full stomach or recently had one, they don't even bother looking to the side of a possible prey. Instead, they feed very irregularly - when food is available, and they have hunting success. At such times, they gorge and fill themselves - and there is no discussion possible that they thoroughly enjoy doing that!

Many people also experience that, when they have difficulty getting the dog to eat something new, a simple way to get it to eat it is to first give it a little of what you know they like - *then* it will eat almost anything after that to fill the stomach! This illustrates that *filling the stomach* is more important to a dog than just "getting a little bite".

Yet, most domestic dogs never get to experience this...

Keeping the dog constantly starving...

Few dog owners want to starve their dog or to keep it constantly hungry. Nevertheless, this is what most people end up doing when they feed their dog multiple daily meals, assuming that this is just as good for a dog as it is for a human.

An adult dog needs an amount of food in average per day that is about 2-3% of its body weight. Considering that it takes 6-8% to fill the stomach, there is just no way the average dog will ever get to experience the satisfying fulfillment of having a full stomach... With 2-3 small meals per day, it will remain constantly hungry!

Changing the feeding pattern

Now, you cannot just start letting a dog fill its stomach, cold turkey, if it has never been used to this. It would be dangerous (risk of bloat because the muscle tissue is far too weak from never having been exercised). Doing it with kibble is, of course, completely out of the question too - it is far too concentrated.

Also, when you ultimately feed your dog as much as it wants in one meal, you cannot feed it more than 3-4 meals per week! However, when you do this, you will see the "food searching" behavior disappear, and you will see your dog gain weight if it is too skinny and lose weight if it is too fat.

You have an important hurdle to overcome before you can safely let you dog eat full meals 3-4 times a week - in addition to your own human-based emotions:

- ◆ You must **train the stomach muscles** to handle the greater volume of a meal. It is like training a broken leg for skiing after getting the cast off... Do it gradually over a period of at least 3 months, preferably 6. (Please refer to my article on [Conditioning](#) if you need help with this.)

I know the concept of feeding only 3-4 times per week sounds brutal - but seriously: it isn't. My dogs have been fed this way for more than 30 years, and I tell you: they enjoy their meals!!! But they also enjoy the time between the meals. I have never had a problem with weight - it regulates itself on an individual basis. I have helped literally hundreds of my students to do the same, and they all report the same great results.... not a single exception!

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Mogens Eliassen holds a mag. scient. degree (comparable to a US Ph. D.) 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 is the author of several unique books about dogs and responsible care of dogs, available from www.k9joy.com. He publishes a 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.

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