

When & How Often Should Dogs Be Fed | Cedar Mill Veterinary Hospital

- Zack W.



There is a lot of conflicting advice out there when it comes to when and how often we should feed our dogs. So today our Portland vets are here to set the record straight.

Determining The Right Eating Schedule For Your Dog

Figuring out how much and when to feed your dog shouldn't feel like deciphering a university physics equation! At Cedar Mill Veterinary Hospital we believe that you just need a little knowledge about how your dog's psychology and the workings of its digestive tract to be able to figure out what will work best for you and your pooch.

Benefits of a Set Feeding Schedule for Dogs

Not only do dogs love life to be predictable, but sticking to a regular schedule can be extremely helpful when it comes to training a puppy or adult rescue dog.

Routinely feeding your puppy or rescue dog at the same times each day, followed by an outdoor break right 5-10 minutes afterward, can help you to predict when your puppy will need to 'go' and will allow your pup to begin associating those urges with going outside.

Feeding your adult dog at the same time each day provides your dog with a sense of security and predictability. Feeding times can form the cornerstone of your dog's daily routine, around which all other activities are scheduled.

Keeping to a set feeding schedule can help your canine companion cope when other changes are going

on around them (the arrival of a new baby or the loss of a family member), and can make a change of food less challenging (because they will be ready to eat at their scheduled time) and can help to make it easier for you to determine whether your dog is eating normally.

Your Dog's Digestion

Your pup has a very simple digestive system. Once your dog has been fed, the food will spend the next few hours gradually working its way through the small intestine. Approximately 8 - 10 hours after your dog eats, its brain will begin sending out signals to stimulate the hunger response once more. This timing of the hunger response is why our Portland vets recommend feeding your dog at least 2 meals per day. By establishing a set feeding schedule your dog's body will be prepared for the food it will receive.

Once your dog becomes used to feeding on schedule it will be easy for you to recognize when there could be a problem. If your dog doesn't finish their food as they usually do or refuses to eat at all, it could be a sign that your pup isn't feeling well. Contact your vet for advice.

Free Choice Feeding & Your Puppy's Health

'Ad libitum' or 'free choice' feeding is when you feed your dog all it can eat at one time. While many pet parents think that puppies should be allowed to eat as much as they want while they are growing, this type of feeding can lead to health issues such as obesity and diabetes as well as possibly setting the stage for orthopedic problems down the road. Slower, controlled growth helps to optimize your dog's health and body condition in adulthood.

It is also true that, much like when we overeat, dogs that eat too much at once can be left feeling bloated and uncomfortable for hours afterward due to their slow digestion.

How Often You Should Feed Your Dog

While we believe that your dog should eat at least twice a day, three times a day (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) is also a terrific feeding schedule for many dogs.

Whether you decide to feed your pup twice or three times a day should be largely based on what is easiest for your family to sustain in the long run. For most pet parents, establishing a twice-daily feeding schedule for their dog works best.

If feeding your dog twice a day, try not to allow more than 12 hours between meals since this can lead to stomach upset in some dogs.

What To Do If Your Dog Doesn't Eat All Their Food