

# Non-Food Treats

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## 10 Ways to Delight Your Dog

Probably the first thing that pops into your mind when you think of a dog “treat” is something to eat. But for dogs on a weight management plan, the extra calories associated with food treats can spoil the effort. By definition, a treat is “a source of a special delight or pleasure.” Response to the treat determines its reward value—what is delightful or pleasurable to some dogs may not be pleasant for others. An active dog may be enthusiastic about a hike in the woods, but an older arthritic dog might find that hike painful. Use your imagination to identify “treats” that have low, no, or negative (burn) calories, making your dog’s weight loss plan even more successful.

Here are 10 ideas you may not have considered “treats,” but your dog probably will!

- **Stroll & Sniff:** Leash your dog and walk him/her around your neighborhood. Make it a leisurely stroll that lets your dog investigate the world using his/her nose, a dog’s primary sensory organ. Pressed for time? To a dog, even a short outing counts as a treat.
  - **Toy Trial:** Set up a toy trial by gathering different types of toys (squeaky, plush, rubber, toss, tug, etc.) and test them with your dog. After you identify the favorites, treat your dog to a few minutes each day devoted to playing with the preferred toy(s). Keep in mind that not all dog toys are rewarding for all dogs. The trial will help you identify which toys excite and please your dog.
  - **Puzzle Food Toys:** Extend the life of a food treat by inserting it into a puzzle food toy designed to create a challenge. Your dog must use both brain and body to manipulate the toy and release the food reward. Examples: Twist ‘n Treat and Squirrel Dude (Premier Pet Products) and Buster Cube (Kruuse A/S).
  - **“Window Shopping”:** Take your dog window shopping! While you browse new fashions and products, your dog (on leash) can investigate the sights, sounds, and smells of new places. This shopping trip will burn calories and be kind to your budget.
  - **Weekly Discovery Treks:** Get a local-area map or guidebook, and pick a new place to discover with your dog each week. Be sure the new area is dog-friendly before you start your adventure. Discovery Treks can consist of walking through different neighborhoods, visiting a new park, hiking a new trail, etc. The length and intensity of the trek should match your dog’s ability.
  - **Car Rides:** Some dogs love to ride in the car for the sheer joy of joining their owner on an outing. A quick trip around the block or picking up the kids from soccer practice can be a real treat. Safety is paramount ... dog body parts should stay inside the car, and no dog should be left in a parked car when the weather is warm.
  - **Doggie Day Care/Dog Park:** For a social dog, a trip to a nearby dog park or a doggie day care excursion can be a special treat. Bonus: the extra calories burned by playing with other dogs helps with weight loss.
  - **Human Touch/Pet Points:** Most dogs have a favored petting spot ... commonly the belly or around the ears/neck or lower back. Find your dog’s favorite pet points and use a special rub there as a treat. Not only will your dog enjoy the attention and experience pleasure, but also petting an animal provides health benefits for you!
  - **Healthy Hobby:** Besides learning a new language or taking an art class, pick a hobby that you can actually enjoy regularly with your dog, such as agility development, therapy work, search and rescue training, dog dancing, obedience, etc.
  - **Food Treats with LIMITS:** Although there are effective ways to give your dog a non-food treat, in some situations food treats may be more practical. In fact, some dogs simply respond positively to food. Moderation is the key to success. Food treats should be small – ideally no larger than your pinkie fingernail. And they should be low in calories. Consider using fresh vegetables - many dogs are overjoyed to receive a tiny bit of carrot as a food reward.
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