

CONTRAFREELOADING

Animals in the wild spend up to 80% of their waking hours foraging for food. Domestic animals are not required to work for their food because it is usually provided by their guardian and freely available. The drive to work for food, however, has not been lost. "Contrafreeloading" is a phenomenon whereby animals have shown a preference for acquiring food for which they have to work, over food that is freely available.

Some animals will eat quickly with ravenous vigour. Others tend to be more picky and nibble on their food throughout the day. By introducing contrafreeloading, we can both slow down ravenous eaters and increase the motivation of fussy eaters.

How do we introduce the concept of contrafreeloading? By removing their food bowl. Every day your dog has a fixed amount of food that they will inevitably consume. You can give it away for free in a bowl, or you can use it to your advantage to:

1. Change behaviour
2. Train tricks
3. Invest in calmness
4. Build your relationship
5. Improve reactivity
6. Reduce aggression
7. Provide mental enrichment
8. Have fun

...and so much more!

Scatter feeding

One of the easiest ways to engage your dog's brain is scatter feeding. This encourages sniffing, promotes mental stimulation, and slows down digestion. Start by making it quite easy to find the food, and then gradually start making longer trails that require some effort to find the food. In multi dog households, you can either feed dogs separately, or supervise feeding time to make sure each dog is finding food. Do not scatter feed multiple dogs at once if they have a history of fighting over food.

Some dogs are confused by the lack of a bowl at first. You can gradually introduce them to scatter feeding by sprinkling some of their food around the the outside of the bowl, each meal scattering further and further away, until you remove the bowl completely.

[Scatter feeding video link](#)



Mental Stimulation

Food Dispensers: You can provide [complex puzzles](#) or [simple dispensers](#), home made or store bought toys, it doesn't really matter; mix it up and keep it fun by providing a few meals a week (if not all) from devices that will challenge your dog's brain. The easiest dispenser is a [yogurt tub](#) or soda bottle with a few holes cut into it so that your dog needs to knock it around to get the kibble to fall out. It's simple, practically free and easy to implement. Feisty feeders may require more sturdy dispensers such as a Kong Wobbler or Rogz Tumbler.

[Kong Wobbler Video](#)

[Tumbler Video Link](#)



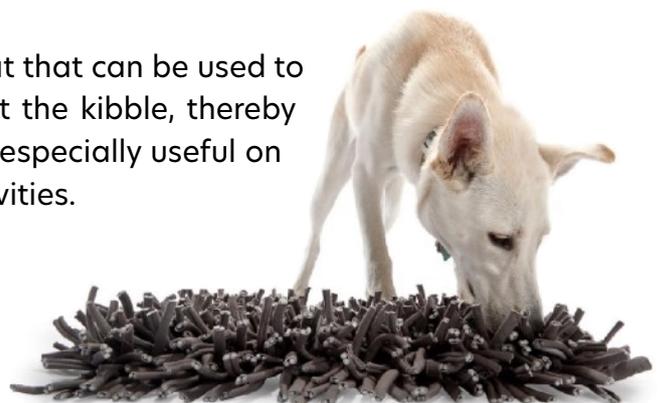
Stuffed Kongs: Kongs are a great option for strong chewers because the rubber is incredibly durable. You can fill your Kong with anything from kibble to wet dog food to peanut butter to left over mashed potato! There are hundreds of ideas online, the sky is the limit. You want to start by making it really easy for your dog to retrieve the food and gradually make it harder so that they don't lose interest. You may need to offer a little encouragement at first while they figure out the game, so make it easy to extract the food. Give lots of praise, but don't help too much, as the process of learning is really what we're after. **Provide Kongs separately to prevent guarding from developing in multi dog households.**

[Introducing a Kong Video Link](#)



Snuffle mats: This is a home-made textured mat that can be used to hide your dog's food. Your dog has to sniff out the kibble, thereby engaging in natural scavenger instincts. This is especially useful on rainy days when it's too muddy for outdoor activities.

[Snuffle Mat tutorial](#)



Food Flick

Dogs have a natural desire to chase. Flicking food across the floor encourages them to engage in this instinctive behaviour. It's fun, it uses up energy, and builds a relationship with you in the process.

[Food flick video](#)

Catch

Drop food from a few inches above your dog's nose. Praise any attempt to catch the food. Dogs are incredibly efficient and will pick up the action of catching within a few sessions. Some dogs prefer food being tossed towards them, play around and find out what your dog likes best.

Dogs learn in context so teaching catch will not necessary teach your dog to snap. If you really want to safeguard your gentle treat-taker, you can use a cue before each behaviour to make the distinction: say **catch** before you toss food and say **gentle** before you present treats calmly. Your dog will learn to prepare for a catch only when you give the cue.

[Catch Video Link](#)

