

COUNTER SURFING



WHY DOES MY DOG COUNTER SURF?

Dogs counter surf because they have learned that kitchen counters are an easy source of yummy snacks. When a dog (or any animal, for that matter) behaves in a certain way and that behavior is rewarded or reinforced, he's more likely to repeat that behavior in the future. Finding food on the counter when he jumps up is a great reward. Dogs are optimists and opportunists, so even if your dog has only found food on the counter once or twice, he will keep on jumping up to look for it.

HOW CAN I PREVENT MY DOG FROM GETTING ON COUNTERS AND TABLES?

The simplest solution, of course, is to manage the situation so that your dog doesn't have access to food on the counters. Here are some tips:

- Never keep food on your counters. If your dog doesn't find any food when he jumps up, he's not getting rewarded for counter surfing.
- Wipe the counter tops thoroughly when you are done cooking so that there's no delicious residue for the dog to lick up. Licking something tasty on a counter can be just as rewarding as finding a piece of food to snack on.
- Crate your dog during meal preparation. The process of cooking tends to involve food spread out on the counters, making it easy for your dog to snag a morsel when you're not looking. If you don't have a crate, you can use a baby gate in the doorway to restrict access to the kitchen or put the dog in another room while you cook.

The main objective here is to arrange your environment (the kitchen and counter tops) so that the dog does not have the opportunity for reinforcement (finding food), which makes him more likely to jump up on the counter in the future.

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STEPS TO TEACH A DOG NOT TO GET ON THE COUNTER

To discourage counter surfing, there are a couple behaviors you can teach your dog. **"Leave it"** is a useful cue for many situations, not the least of which is managing counter surfing. To start training your dog to leave it, go somewhere quiet and less exciting to the dog than the kitchen. Here are the steps to follow:

1. With a treat in both hands, place your hands behind your back.
2. Make a fist with one hand and offer that hand to your dog, letting him sniff your fist.
3. Say "Leave it" and wait until he is done sniffing. As soon as he's done sniffing, say "Yes," or click with a clicker, and offer him the treat from the other hand.
4. Keep doing this until your dog immediately stops sniffing your hand when you say "Leave it." When this happens consistently, you are ready to move on to the next step.
5. Start by leashing the dog and then toss a treat outside of his reach. Say "Leave it" and wait until he stops sniffing and pulling toward the treat.
6. When he stops sniffing and pulling, say "Yes" (or click) and give him a treat that he likes even more than the one on the floor. Over time, by practicing this exercise, your dog should stop pulling as soon as you give the "Leave it" cue.

Make sure the treats with which you are rewarding him are especially tasty, not just plain old kibble. By doing so, you are teaching him that asking him to leave it doesn't mean he won't get anything. (On the contrary, he might get something more delicious instead.) When trying to dissuade a counter surfer, you need to help him learn that leaving the human food alone is more rewarding than counter surfing.

"Off" is another useful cue to teach your counter surfer. Here's how to do it:

1. When he jumps up onto the counter in search of food, put a dog treat in front of his nose. When you have his attention, use the treat as a lure to guide him off the counter and onto the floor, saying "Off."
2. When his feet hit the ground, say "Yes" (or click) and give him the treat.
3. After practicing this exercise three or four times, say "Off" instead of placing a treat in front of his nose to lure him off. If he jumps off the counter, praise him, say "Yes" (or click) and give him a treat.
4. If he doesn't jump off, you might need to lure him off the counter with treats a few more times before he figures out that "Off" means that his paws should come off the counter and go back on the floor. Some dogs learn the cue quickly while others take a little more time. Your dog is an individual and will learn at his own pace.

You can also train your dog to **"go to his bed or special place"** while you cook or prepare food. This cue is useful when he is hanging out in the kitchen with you and starts getting a little too interested in the food, but your hands are busy so you can't put him in the crate or relocate him. If you train him to go to his place on cue, he relocates himself. Here are the steps to teach your dog **"Go to your Place"**:

1. Begin by tossing some treats onto a dog bed or mat and when your dog goes over to investigate, say "Yes" (or click).
2. After you do this several times, your dog will probably start going over to his bed without any treats to prompt him. When he starts walking over to his bed, say whatever cue you want to use (for example, "Bed") and then when he gets there, mark it with a "Yes" or click, and give him some treats.

Obviously, these strategies only work when you are there to give the cue. When you're not going to be around, make sure you remove temptation either by blocking off access to the kitchen or by keeping the counters clear of food. Remember, dogs are opportunists, so it's unfair to expect your dog to ignore that delicious loaf of bread you just baked and left cooling on the counter while you run to the grocery store.