

## Counter Surfing

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*If your dog already has a counter surfing problem do the following exercises below: "**How to fix a Counter Surfing Problem**" along with the advice below on "**How to keep Counter Surfing from ever starting**". These exercises are designed to help those with counter surfing problems and to help keep counter surfing from happening.*

Dogs are natural food scavengers they will eat many items that we humans know are inappropriate such as foil, plastic wrappers and more. The only other alternative to counter surfing without "training" is to never allow your dog into your kitchen. This article will help you train your dog NOT to counter surf.

It's trickier to get rid of counter surfing in a dog that has had success, than with a dog that has tried but never succeeded in rewarding himself with a treat off the counter. In order to end counter surfing we need to extinguish the behavior by arranging for him to have a zero success rate on lots and lots of tries, until he stops trying. There are several methods to help you. If your dog already has a problem counter surfing, you will need to lean his reach and ALWAYS keep goodies beyond it. If he succeeds in getting something off the counter it gives him a reason to try again. You may find that your dogs front paws grow and he can reach the back of the counter, for these dogs you will have to keep all food off the counters, during your training which may take several months.

**Note:** *Your dog's behavior will often get more intense before the behavior dies and this can be annoying for the owners.*

If you already have a dog with a reward history for counter surfing it will take many, many, times to train the dog not to jump on the counters. Some dogs will even figure out when it's safe to do this behavior and when it's not. If your dog has been successful in his attempts you must ALWAYS keep food out of his reach.

### How to fix a Counter Surfing problem

*Note: a correction that the dog perceives as coming from the owner is only going to reinforce to the dog that when he is counter surfing, it is NOT safe when the owner is around. A correction when the owner is not in the room works better, as it seems to come from outer space.*

These exercises will have to be repeated a number of time. I also recommend you follow the exercises for dogs that don't have a counter surfing problem and train your dog to go to his "place".

First you will need to make a device to startle the dog. I have two suggestions.

**Note:** *I prefer the Pop Cans to the towel.*

1. A towel that is folded in half lengthwise, roll the towel into a tight cylinder, and put rubber bands on the ends of the towel.
2. Pop cans with pennies, (12) be sure to tape the cans shut with duck tape.(Three or more).

### **Towel**

Set up the counter with a tasty tidbit making sure it's out of your dogs reach. Now go around the corner of the kitchen, have the towel ready. When the dog jumps up, his front paws are on the counter, launch the towel toward the dogs face. Use enough force to startle the dog. (BE QUIET) then walk into the room and ask the dog to do a behavior it can do easily and reward. I recommend a down, in a special place, in the kitchen out from under foot.

### **Pop Cans**

Tape some thread or string to the bottom of each can about 6 to 9 inches long. Select some very delicious, tempting, and smelly food. Put them in a plastic container with a lid (small butter containers work well) and punch some holes in the lid of the container. Now tape the string to the bottom of the container with the special treat inside. (The container keeps the dog from getting the food).

Without showing the dog what you are doing, but with the dog in the room, give him a tiny morsel of the food, just so he might "think" about stealing from the counter. Set up your trap. Not too easy, place it where food would be if you were distracted by the front door. Pretend the doorbell rang and leave the room. Wait and listen. When you hear the noise, come running in and pretend to be upset about the terrible thing that happened. Make more noise than the cans. Then set it up again! Odds are he will not touch it again today. But, he will try again tomorrow. It isn't learned the first time, but having a dog create his own corrections, help eliminate the behavior quickly.

## **How to keep Counter Surfing from ever starting**

To keep counter surfing from ever starting and to correct a counter surfing behavior problem start by teaching the dog to do a down-stay in a special place in the kitchen out from under foot. Once your dog is able to do a down-stay for 5 minutes you will begin his training during food preparation times. This will extend the amount of time it takes to prepare your meals but is well worth it. Your dog will learn that the best way to receive a tidbit is to remain on a mat, or to be in the same spot. Your timing will make a big difference in how quickly progress is made. Catching him after he has left his place or mat and walked several steps is far from catching the first muscle contraction or intention to break the stay. This is why, for a few days you will need to extend the time it takes to prepare your meals as this will be very time consuming in the early stages of training when rewards are given frequently. A large amount of time will be needed to keep a good eye on the dog during the first few training sessions.

*Note: the "mat" "place" or "spot" is the "ONLY" place in the kitchen where your dog gets any treats.*

Once your dog can do a down-stay for 5 minutes, whenever you are in the kitchen have your dog go to his "place". Reward him every 10 seconds for the first two rewards then every 20 seconds for the next two rewards, then every 30 seconds. Gradually stretch the rewarding until the dog can hold his stay for the entire time you prepare a meal for a treat at the end. To achieve this it can take several weeks depending on how many times you practice. If he gets up at anytime during training you give a no-reward mark such as AH! AH! And take him back to his "place". Your dog learns that if he breaks the stay, he will be put back anyway, but if he holds the stay on his own, he has a good chance for a reward.

Even if your dog has never has a counter surfing problem you will want to set the dog up. If your dog has counter surfing problem you will definitely need to set the dog up. After you have trained the first steps and your dog is successful in staying in his "place" while you prepare a whole meal do the following steps: Place the dog in a down stay in his place. You must catch the first time he experiments at sneaking to the counter when you're absent. Deliberately leave something tempting on the counter and exit the room nonchalantly. You will spy on your dog.

***Note: make the time you are out of the room short and slowly build the time you are out of the room.***

As soon as the dog contracts a muscle to leave his place, burst back in and enforce your down-stay. If you do this a couple of time, most dogs learn that his best chance of scoring rewards is by staying in his place whether you are in the room or not. If your dog is successful in staying in his place return to the kitchen and reward him.

If your dog does not have a history of counter surfing the smart thing to do is plan ahead and set up your dog. By doing the above exercises your dog will learn that it is **ALWAYS** dangerous to try getting up on the counter. You know that one day he will try, so catch the first food stealing experiment and give your dog the right idea about counter surfing.

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