

Help for Counter Surfing

Counter surfing is a fairly easy behavior to prevent, but it is a much more difficult behavior to fix once a dog is doing it. Make a plan. Don't leave it to chance and just expect your puppy or dog to know they shouldn't take things off of the counters. They are dogs after all, and they will be attracted to yummy food and other fun items that are available and within reach.

- **You must dog and puppy proof!** If you have a dog that is, or will be able to get to your tables or counters when they are fully grown, you must put away all food that is not being used. Don't leave things on the counters when you are not supervising. Ever. Forever. This is simple "Living with a Dog 101." (And, if you have a small dog, don't think that you will escape the dreaded counter surfing—I've seen small dogs jump from chair, to table, to counter to get at yummy stuff!)
- **Decide where you want your dog to be when you are preparing food.** Do you want your dog to be on a mat, behind a baby gate, or simply outside of the kitchen? Do not expect that your dog can be underfoot and not be tempted by cooking. Dogs are, well, dogs. They are opportunistic beings and it has served them well for thousands of years. That is not going to change.
- **Train your dog where to be!** Once you've decided where you want them to be, take the time to train them in a way that makes it very worthwhile for them to be there. Check out our video on mat training in the kitchen! Or our handout on teaching your dog to settle on their mat.
- **Teach your dog leave it.** Then practice it around food. Don't wait for your dog to start to make a mistake, and then try and teach them leave it. Teach them the cue by starting with "It's Your Choice" and "Leave It: Step One." Then start to do some set ups. Put something interesting, but not too interesting on the table or counter, if your dog shows some interest (and before they go for it!!) ask them to "leave it" and then reward them with a jackpot of something better than what they left. Practice in different locations, with different foods, all the while making sure your rewards are way, way better. Follow up every "leave it" and reward with "go to your mat" and reward. Pretty soon you will notice your dog will start to choose the mat on their own! They will smell something awesome, and they will head for their spot because they know that is where they get the goods.



If your dog does, at some point, catch you off guard and go for something, can you say no? Sure, give it a try. Some dogs will respond to no very well and stay away from the counters when you are around. However, very few dogs will stay away when you aren't around, so remember the first bullet above and do really good management when you aren't supervising.

What do you do if your dog is already counter surfing? Pretty much the same thing as above, it will just take a lot more management until your dog is retrained. Retraining is never as quick and training right from the start.