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# Dog Talk Weekly

Where we talk about dogs, share stories, solve problems

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Issue 11.1.3 – Jan. 24, 2011

## **ANNOUNCEMENT: I need your Ideas!**

**What topics would you like covered in Dog Talk Weekly?** You're sure to have some questions or curiosity about something related to choosing, getting, owning, training and caring for your dog.

Let me know the breed you have or any that you're interested in and I'll use them as *Dog of the Week*. If you have a story idea, send it along. Just send the details to me through my contact form: <http://sylviadickens.com/contactform/contactus.php>

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## **Feature Article: Nutrition: How Fussy Must You Be?**

We all want our dogs to live as long as possible. In fact, if we had our way, we'd want them to live out our entire life but of course that's just not feasible. At best, we can take care what we feed them.

You will find a ton of material on nutrition both on the Internet and at the local library. Books have been dedicated to this one topic.

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For this issue, I was looking through a book, "Feed Your Pet Right" by Marion Nestle and Malden C. Nesheim. After reviewing several chapters that I felt would provide some good tips I could pass on to you, I was mistaken.

While the content is probably helpful for those of you who are interested in reading such minute details about the topic, it didn't seem to be very helpful in providing real answers. For instance, it talks about tests done on a small group of dogs to see how well they fared on a low calorie diet. The purpose of the test was to identify if such a diet would benefit the dogs by extending their lives.

This sounded promising because no one wants their dog to get overweight and ill.

Since reducing calories has long been considered a great way to expand longevity, it makes sense to try to convert that to our dogs.

The test was conducted by Nestle Purina PetCare on 24 pairs of Labrador retrievers. One of each pair received the entire diet while the other halves received 75% of their normal food rations.

What seems like some odd plan, they changed the plan after 3 years and began limiting the caloric intake of the other dogs on non-restricted diets as well. This was to prevent them from becoming obese. They also reduced the restricted dogs' diets to 75% of what they had been getting on those restricted diets.

At the end of the study, those on restricted diets from the start weighed 26% less than the other half of the dogs. As well, they were healthier and lived 2 years longer to an average of 13 years compared to 11.

The problem is that these results do not provide any clues into how dog owners can implement this information at home. For one thing, you'd be living with a constantly hungry dog who is likely to be more lethargic.

Also, the dogs in the test were confined to pens and there is no information regarding the amount of activity they received during that time.

The conclusions reached in the book are simply, "...the study provides good evidence that pets should not be overfed or allowed to become obese."

The book then goes on to discuss the benefits of antioxidants to minimize the damage to protein, fats and DNA which causes age-related diseases.

After reviewing this section of the book, I'm tempted to simply say that basically you need to ensure your dog gets a good, nutritious meal every day (or whatever schedule your dog needs and the dog food recommends), eliminate any junk food from your dog's diet (no potato chips, people cookies or the like), and include natural healthy foods that contain antioxidants.

By sticking to a proper diet and giving your dog the amount of exercise he or she needs every day, you can help your dog to maintain a healthy weight.

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I agree that the book contains a lot of good information that appears to be well-researched, but sometimes, we can go too far. We can become obsessed with the topic. In the end, it comes down to common sense and an understanding of the dog's nutritional needs.

### **Personal Story: How I Deal With Tyler's Attention Getting Tricks**

Those of you who have been reading Dog Talk Weekly and my dog blog will probably recall me mentioning my Belgian shepherd's antics to gain my attention. He's a dominant personality, which means he can be quite demanding at times.

He has several favorite tricks to get my attention. He forcefully nudges my hand or he rests his chin on my leg.

While these moves are kind of cute, they put him in the driver's seat. And that's not a good thing. Dogs with these mannerisms think they are the boss. They are determined to get their way. They have little regard for you in the role of pack leader.

At first, I did allow these antics to continue because I didn't realize these were dominant behaviors. So is the dog putting his paw on your arm. Fortunately, Tyler is a big baby who would have a hard time hurting a fly, but it doesn't stop him from being forceful when he wants something.

A long time ago, I read that dogs don't generally like to hold a stare with another being. They see this as confrontation. In some dogs, it can lead to the other animal or human being attacked by the dog. Tame dogs have learned that it's generally okay to look a human in the eye and do not seem quite so upset by it.

I also read that you can test a dog's dominance by looking him in the eye to see how long he will hold the stare. My previous dogs would only hold for about 15 seconds tops. Tyler, on the other hand, will hold it for a very long time, probably closer to 30 seconds, perhaps more. It amazes me that he will hold it for that long.

He doesn't blink. He doesn't look away. He just stops what he's doing and looks back at me.

What does this have to do with his attention-getting antics?

I use staring to show in that I am the boss. He always looks away before I do, probably because he just gets bored. But in the dog world, this is important.

He has learned that when he's doing something that I do not like and I stare at him, he will stop the behavior.

Now, I do not recommend you do this yourself unless you truly understand how your dog will react.

I've also taught him that this nudging behavior is "being pushy". All I have to do on such occasions is simply tell him, "Don't be pushy!" Most of the time, he will stop, but there are still times when he absolutely insists, if not by nudging, then by resting his chin on my leg.

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In the majority of cases, he does it because he wants something. That "something" is not always obvious. After he's been out, after he's eaten, after we've played he will sometimes pull the tricks.

At least he pays attention when I instruct him not to be pushy. The rest of the time, I struggle to guess what in the world he wants. My suspicion is that he would much rather be out playing with children than sitting at home with me.

### **Dog of the Week: Bernese Mountain Dog**



Photo taken by [Christian Gidlöf](#)

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This week, I chose the Bernese Mountain Dog because I absolutely love the coloring of this breed. There are several other breeds with this coloring, too – black, white, tan.

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The Mountain Dog was bred from several Swiss farm dog breeds to guard the farm animals and tow the milk wagons. It is one of the most beloved and beautiful farm dogs today. It is good natured, loving and reliable around children, but not necessarily inviting of strangers. It is quite the homebody, with little interest in wandering off or hunting.

As far as exercise goes, the Bernese loves being outdoors and taking long walks, although running is out of the question, because of its susceptibility to developing elbow dysplasia. Beware of overexertion when the dog is young. Because of its genetic make-up for cold climates, it does not tolerate the heat very well.

Basic training is all that is required of this breed, but you have to start early and be consistent.

The breed grows to a good size: 25-28 inches, 79-106 lbs. in males and 23-26 inches, 75-90 lbs in females. Its life expectancy is 8-12 years.

### **Regular Sections:**

#### **- Dog Care: Grooming**

Grooming a dog can be a struggle. Some dogs just do not like it, regardless of their age. It's a good idea to teach your dog to hold still at an early age so you can brush him. One trick is to put a portion of spreadable cheese or peanut butter on your refrigerator door. Let your dog lick it while you groom him. This will keep him occupied so that he eventually learns to hold still through the process.

Eventually, you will be able to brush your dog without the edible treat, but do give him something for being good when you're done.

#### **- Dog Training: Training with Life Rewards**

Life rewards are things that your dog gets to enjoy for obeying your commands. They are not the typical treats that you might use in the early training days. You do not want to continue those because your dog will look for rewards, not to please you. Training should end with your dog respecting you, not looking for food treats.

That's where life rewards come in. Once your dog has learned the command, switch to a life reward thereafter. These become embedded into your dog's life in a more natural way, like being fed, taking a walk, playing with you, etc.

To maintain the sit command, teach your dog to sit before you give him his food dish, before he goes for his walk, and before you play with him as well as any other times when you are about to do something with or for your dog.

In time, he will learn to sit automatically before each of those activities. There are added benefits to switching from food treats. For one, your dog will not be at risk for becoming overweight. Some dogs that are given a lot of treats tend to reject their regular food. This then becomes another problem that you will have to overcome to ensure your dog stays healthy.

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## - Dog Games: The Tunnel

The goal of this game is to teach your dog to run through a tunnel and come out the other end. Typically, dogs will not like being in a confined place, so you'll have to gain your dog's trust first. Start with a small cardboard box that is stable enough not to collapse on her.

Get her to run through it and reward her when she pops out the other end. Gradually increase the length of the tunnel. When she starts enjoying this game, it's a good idea to invest in a proper play tunnel. These are round and long, like a sewer pipe, but made of soft material.

If your dog tries to turn back to the start part of the way through, place yourself at the exit end of the tunnel. As she becomes more comfortable with this game, you can create turns in the tunnel to make it more challenging for her.

Use this as one part of a larger obstacle course for your dog. She will love the running, jumping, and the thrill of your praise.

## - Dog Trivia

Let's face it. Dogs are unemployed! They no longer have to hunt or fight off predators for survival. We've taken all of that away. It's important to replace those activities with something equally meaningful. Otherwise, your dog can become hyperactive, unsatisfied, frustrated and even ill-behaved.

Here's one way to do it. Turn walks into hunting activities if you have a hunting or sporting dog (German shepherds, hounds, etc.). Take alternate routes. Give your dog tasks that it can master. Your goal is to get them to use their inbred intelligence and natural genetic tendencies.

Toss a ball into a pile of leaves or a snow bank. Let your dog find it. With two people on the walk, you can invent many fun mind games. Have your partner go ahead and hide while you distract the dog. Then, watch your dog track your partner to his or her hiding spot. Dogs love this exercise! It gives them a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

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## Do You Need Professional Dog Training Advice?

Who **can't** use input from someone who knows all the secrets to developing a cooperative and abiding dog? I know I sure could. In my travels, I came across a program that has received high praise for its effectiveness. It was created by a professional dog trainer. I like that his instructions are so easy to follow.

Shortly after opening the package, I discovered what I needed to do to stop my dog from pulling on the leash. Admitted, it's not a permanent solution because Tyler is so demanding, energetic and dominant. He KNOWS how to heel. He just refuses to obey. And I'm not physically strong enough to stop him. It's probably me, but I did make huge progress with this advice. At least he doesn't drag me off into the bushes any more.

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Take a look at [Secrets To Dog Training](#) by Daniel Stevens. Dogs love to play catch, fetch things and in general, please their owners. In his book, he demonstrates how to train your dog to do all these things, and more.

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**Dog Nutrition** is vital to your dog's life expectancy and quality of life. I've written a book on how to make sure your dog gets a healthy, nutritious diet and avoids many of the dangers that come with certain foods. Find out more at <http://healthydognutritionsecrets.com/healthydogPP1.htm>

**Puppy Parenting Course:** Are you drowning in a sea of questions about raising your puppy the right way? This 24-week course feeds you all the information you need in bite-size portions that you can use during your puppy's early years. Get a free trial today. <http://www.dogownersu.com/FreeTrial.htm>

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I hope you've enjoyed this issue!

Sylvia