



High Value Treats (HVT's)

When a dog is eating, her brain releases chemicals (dopamine and serotonin) that tell her that things are good, and to remember and repeat the action that led to the food. Because our dogs have this software already installed in their brains, food is an incredibly powerful tool for changing behavior, ie. training.

There is research that suggests that the higher the natural salt content in the food the stronger this effect is, the more “feel good” chemicals are dolled out by the brain. The idea being that the higher salt content the higher fat content, which, when you don't know how long it will be until your next meal...the higher the fat content the better for survival. So, even though most companion dogs do not have to worry that they won't get enough to eat, they still have thousands of years of DNA in them which tells the brain to reward the dog for eating high fat food. This makes sense if you think about it, *you* feel happier eating pizza or a milkshake than a piece of broccoli, right?

The rule with HVT's is the three S's, **Salty, Squishy, Stinky**. You can see how meats and cheeses would be high on this list. The highest value treat (typically, it does vary dog to dog) is tripe, which is sheep stomach. Gross, right!? But effective. You might not want to use sheep stomach, but don't worry. You can usually do just fine with liver, sardines, anchovies, tuna, steak, bacon, pepperoni, stinky cheeses, sausages, hams, hot dogs, chicken, beef, turkey, cheddar, feta (all other cheeses) and soft treats.

Our dogs will tell us what their specific treat hierarchy is. You can test out your dog's order by presenting her with 2 different treats and see which she eats first. Repeat this 3 to 5 times, if she is consistent or after a couple of repetitions becomes consistent, you know that the treat she eats first is of higher value to her. If she is not consistent, the treats are mostly equal to her.

Keep in mind that when training, we only need to use a pea sized treat that is high *enough* in value that the dog will work for it. However, in Behavior Modification, we want to really hit the brain with lots of dopamine and serotonin, so don't skimp! The more difficult the task or the stronger the association we are trying to make, the higher value the treat should be. For training purposes, it is helpful to make a list of the training goals and a list of your dog's HVT's. List the training goals in order from hardest for your dog to easiest, and list the treats from highest value to lowest. Next, match up the treats with the list and stock up on the HVT's!