

**Guidelines for Dogs Who are Picky Eaters**

Occasionally we have dogs in our program who are picky eaters (most often Golden Retrievers) and staff may find this surprising and/or concerning.  GDB staff veterinarians and BRD staff have written this document to outline GDB strategies approved when caring for a dog who is a picky eater.

**Why are they picky?**

* Some people enjoy the nurturing feelings of coaxing a dog to eat, they are also concerned about keeping their dog healthy and closely monitor eating and relieving habits. Without meaning to, they can create picky-eaters, by adding a tasty treats or canned food whenever their dog does not finish a meal. Feeding appropriate treats is okay for healthy dogs with no eating behavior problems, but is NOT okay to give junk food to picky-eater dogs. Dogs are opportunistic eaters by nature, if offered something that tastes or smells better than their regular food; they’ll choose the junk food option. And when already full of junk food, who is going to eat that healthy stuff?  These poor eating habits may be inadvertently created in the raiser home.
* There are two kinds of dogs. The first kind lives to eat. They will devour anything you put in front of them, this describes most (if not all) of our Labradors! The second kind eats to live. They pick and choose, take longer to finish meals, and sometimes won’t finish them at all; a dog’s size, breed, and age often dictate whether he adores food or could care less. It is not uncommon for our adolescent Goldens to fall into this second category, particularly when they arrive in the kennel for formal training.  In our experience, most of them seem to outgrow their picky ways. Ask any of the “old-timers” at GDB, many will tell you stories of picky eaters in the kennel who, when seen the following year, have become overweight and must be placed on a diet.

**What should we do with a picky eater?**

* A picky dog that maintains a healthy weight and BCS, is alert and perky, and has a shiny coat, is much less worrisome than one who has dropped significant weight, is lethargic, has poor stool quality and has a less lustrous coat.
* Come up with a feeding plan and ensure that it is well communicated and followed by all who come in contact with the dog.  Adding canned food or making frequent food switches is not recommended.
* If the dog refuses to eat, he is likely holding out for better/different food, high value treats, or the addition of canned food.  It is important to hold firm to the plan. Just because they skip a few meals, don’t give in and reinforce their behavior by feeding something more desirable.
* **Leave the bowl out for 10 minutes, and if they do not finish, take it away**. Document food intake and consult with staff veterinarians if an otherwise healthy, normal acting dog goes **more than 2 days** without eating.
* **Consult with staff veterinarians regarding pregnant and lactating broods who are not eating well**

Consult staff veterinarians on any dog who does not eat *and also* shows other signs of illness (poor stool, lethargy, vomiting, etc)

**Any dog that is receiving medication and is not eating should be brought to the attention of a veterinarian within one day.**

Additional strategies utilized by training and neonatal staff for dogs who aren’t eating well in the kennel include some of the following:

* If the dog is only eating part of its meal, decrease the amount of food offered twice a day to the amount the dog is typically consuming. Once the dog is eating that amount well gradually increase the amount to the long term goal amount.
* Feeding the dog in a different location other than its run
* Consider changing the type of bowls or put the bowl on a padded surface in case a noisy stainless steel bowl is an issue; some dogs may be sensitive to collar tags clanging on the bowl.
* Some dogs may eat better when singled while some will eat better with a roommate or next to another dog. (staff supervision may be necessary)
* Some dogs prefer food dry (w/o water added)

All of these options are temporary tools with the goal being to get the dog to eat a standard ration regularly in its own kennel. Since each dog is an individual and has its own reasons for not eating well, staff can work through options that work for the individual dog.

* Be sure to monitor and document weight and BCS.