

Begging For Food at the Table
Daniel Estep, Ph.D. and Suzanne Hetts, Ph.D.
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Most pet owners find it annoying when their dogs pester or beg for food at the table. Dogs develop this behavior for one reason – when owners offer them food while a meal at the table is in progress. Even occasional treating from the table can result in begging, because intermittent reinforcement on a random schedule is like being rewarded from a slot machine – every now and then the payoff is big enough to make persistence worthwhile. Curing a begging problem is not complicated, but it does require a strong commitment from all family members. It means that from now on, the dog is never, ever fed from the table. All family members must consistently follow this rule. At first, expect the dog to respond by showing other annoying behaviors. Hard-core beggars will become frustrated, and likely start pawing or barking at family members. These behaviors must be ignored. If owners give in, the dog has then learned to be even more obnoxious. The dog may also do other things to get the owner's attention, such as chewing on forbidden objects, stealing clothes, getting into the trash, etc. These behaviors can either be prevented (don't allow the dog access to these rooms), or give the dog another, acceptable behavior to perform. For example, the dog can be taught to lay down in a particular location during meals, by giving him a special chew toy and treats at that location, and for a while even leashing him to the spot. Once the dog seems to have stopped begging, he may all of a sudden start doing it again. This is a normal part of treatment, and it is extremely important to continue to ignore the behavior. It will usually go away much sooner than it did the first time. Slipping up and feeding the dog from the table will almost surely cause a recurrence of the begging. Just be sure that when you want to give your dog table scraps, put them in his bowl, rather than feeding him from the table. Check with your veterinarian about the types and quantities of scraps that are safe.