



Smart Eats: 3 Reasons NOT to Free Feed Your Doberman

Free feeding means you make food available to your dog at all times, or set the bowl down and allow them to come back to it for an extended amount of time. It is used for convenience, and sometimes for picky eaters. Most animal experts agree that **scheduled feeding is better than free feeding**, for the following reasons:

PREVENT BLOAT

Dobermans are at a uniquely higher risk for bloat due to their deep chests. Eating or drinking large amounts at one time and exercising a lot after eating can increase the risk of Bloat, and can be best monitored via scheduled feeding. One study states that "For both large- and giant-breed dogs, the risk of [Bloat] was highest for dogs fed a larger volume of food once daily."

AVOID GUARDING AND IMPROVE BEHAVIOR

If you have multiple dogs, scheduled feeding allows you to monitor meals and correct inappropriate behavior or guarding. You may even feed the dogs separately or in their crates (which is great for crate training).

In terms of guarding from humans, you can watch for guarding behaviors and if you see any, work with a trainer. With a younger dog, you can work on exercises to prevent food guarding all together. It is especially important that a rescue Doberman, who has been through a lot and likely has an unknown past, not be expected to free feed with other pets.

Meals can also be valuable training tools to work on basic obedience, impulse control, and more. While outdated Dominance theories suggest you should eat before your dog, or control their meals, scheduled feeding is really more about developing structure, expectations, and a bond with your dog.

Worried about a late night at work? Don't get too caught up on the routine. Your dog can handle some of its meals a couple hours off schedule.

ELIMINATE OBESITY & MONITOR HEALTH

It is common for veterinarians to see [obese](#) Dobermans that are being free fed. Free feeding makes it harder to keep track of what your dog eats, or if one dog is eating more than their fair share. Further, appetite is an important indicator of health; loss of appetite is a first sign of illness that you may miss with free feeding.

Many Dobermans benefit from supplements and medication, which can be included during scheduled meal times.

Scheduled feeding is also more hygienic for your dog and your home, makes for more regular #2s, and prevents unwanted pests.



How Do You Make the Switch?

Consult with a veterinarian if you have a dog with special diet/health needs.

- Divide the necessary food allocation into two meals per day (more for puppies). Pick your new feeding times.
- If the dog leaves the bowl for more than a couple minutes, pick it up.
- Dogs will not starve themselves, they will pick up on the new schedule after a couple days.
- Dealing with a picky eater? Reach out to us or your vet for more tips and guidance.