



Counter Surfing during the Holidays

The holidays bring plenty of delicious smells — cookies cooling, turkey roasting, and snacks spread across every surface. Unfortunately, our pets find those smells just as irresistible as we do! If your dog can't resist hopping up to sneak a taste, it's time to work on stopping counter surfing before it becomes a dangerous habit.

Here's how to keep your countertops — and your pet — safe this holiday season.

Manage the Temptation

The easiest way to prevent counter surfing is to remove the temptation. If your pet learns that counters never hold rewards, they won't even try in the first place.

- Keep food pushed far back on counters and covered when possible.
- Clean up spills and crumbs right away.
- Never leave cooling trays or plates unattended.



Set Up Physical Boundaries

During big cooking days, use management tools to keep your pet out of the kitchen altogether. Baby gates or exercise pens can block off cooking areas. This helps your pet feel included in the activity without being underfoot (or nose-deep in the mashed potatoes).

Teach an Alternative Behavior

Train your pet what *to* do instead of jumping up:

- Teach a *"Leave it"* and *"Off"* command before the holidays begin
- Practice your *"Place"* command around all types of distractions so it has been proofed in a variety of environments
- Utilize your dog's crate if you don't have time to actively work with them



Don't Reward the Behavior

Even one successful "grab" reinforces counter surfing. Pets quickly learn that jumping up sometimes results in delicious payoffs. This will cause them to want to jump up more because they may be rewarded.



Make sure all family members and guests know not to feed your pet from counters or tables. This will help ensure they don't associate tasty things coming from the table or counter.



If your dog does jump up, calmly remove them from the area without making a big deal of it. Focus on preventing access and providing your dog with an alternative behavior.

What foods can my dog enjoy?



Dog Friendly (in moderation)

(Plain, unseasoned, and without butter, sauces, or added sugar)

- Turkey** – Plain, cooked turkey breast with no skin, bones, or seasoning.
- Mashed Potatoes** – Only if made *without butter, milk, garlic, or salt*. Plain boiled potatoes are safest.
- Sweet Potatoes** – Plain and baked or boiled. Avoid marshmallows or added sugar.
- Carrots** – Cooked or raw; a great crunchy, healthy snack.
- Green Beans** – Plain and steamed; skip the casserole version.
- Apples** – Sliced with core and seeds removed.
- Pumpkin** – Plain, canned pumpkin (not pie filling) helps digestion.
- Bread** – Small, plain pieces are fine if your dog isn't sensitive to grains.
- Small bits of cheese** – Okay in moderation if your dog tolerates dairy.



Foods to Avoid (toxic or unsafe)

- Turkey Skin, Bones, or Gravy** – High in fat and salt; bones can splinter and cause injury.
- Sweet Potato Casserole** – Marshmallows and added sugar can upset your dog's stomach.
- Pumpkin or Apple Pie** – Contains sugar, spices, and often xylitol (toxic to dogs).
- Onions, Garlic, Chives, Leeks** – Toxic and can damage red blood cells.
- Grapes and Raisins** – Extremely toxic, even in small amounts.
- Chocolate or Desserts** – Dangerous and potentially deadly to dogs.
- Alcohol** – Even small sips can cause serious illness.
- Butter, Cream, and Heavy Sauces** – Too rich and fatty for most dogs.
- Stuffing** – Often contains onion, garlic, and seasoning unsafe for dogs.
- Bread Dough (uncooked)** – Can expand in the stomach and cause severe issues.



If your pet is persistent despite your best efforts, consider working with a trainer. They can help identify triggers, teach impulse control, and build better habits in a supportive way.

With consistency, your dog will learn that good things come from staying off of the counter.

Training shouldn't stop when the holidays end! Continue rewarding your dog for calm, polite behavior around food. The more you reinforce these habits in everyday life, the easier it will be to maintain them during high-energy gatherings.