



## Opportunistic Scavenging in Dogs

By Katie Bedrossian – Pet Behaviour Consultant

### *Did you know that the way our dogs eat is labelled as ‘opportunistic scavenger’?*

This means that they take any opportunity to scavenge for food and enjoy the search as much as the food!

If you are the guardian of a dog who searches kitchen benches and dining tables for tiny morsels of food, hangs at your feet while you cook, climbs into the dishwasher or has worked out how to get into your rubbish bins, you probably already know your dog as a scavenger.

If your dog is not typically a scavenger, it is important to be aware that some medications, such as prednisolone, can increase hunger which can cause scavenging behaviour to start or escalate.

With Easter coming up, we need to be even more vigilant about our opportunistic scavengers. We certainly want to avoid them consuming chocolate in our Easter treats and sultanas in our Hot Cross Buns, as well as other items that are potentially dangerous if consumed by dogs.

### *How can we prevent access to these items?*

- Keep any food preparation and consumption areas clear of food when not in use, particularly when you are not around.
- Whenever these areas are not in use, ensure your dog can't reach the food. Barriers are one way to do it, using either a pen to keep your dog in or gates and barriers to keep your dog out. Tethering (securing your dog on lead to something solid out of reach of the food areas) works well for small dogs. Larger dogs may need to be in another room or outside.
- When separating your dog from food areas, pre-emptively prepare either their meal food or a special high value treat in a food dispensing toy, such as snuffle mats, Kongs, Lickimats or puzzle toys. Give this item at the same time as separating them so there is a positive association. You could also give an edible chew if your dog prefers, such as dental chews, bully sticks or beef jerky.
- Keep your bins in a bin cupboard, on an unreachable countertop (for small dogs) or with a dog proof barrier around them.
- Use toddler safety proof bin latches for dogs that have worked out how to open the bin. I have met dogs that have even figured out how to press the peddle on bins!



- Buy fruitless or apple and cinnamon hot cross buns, as these don't contain sultanas. Alternatively, introduce a fun activity, such as making your own hot cross buns with other dried fruit (try dried apricots, blueberries or cranberries).
- Ensure Easter egg hunts are only carried out in areas your dog can't access, particularly from the start of the eggs being hidden to the end point of all the eggs being found. Hopefully the Easter bunny who hid the eggs can keep count and come back to assist if some are still missing at the end of the hunt, so that no stray ones are left where your dog can get them.
- Be extra vigilant with all the management tools above when household members are consuming any foods that are toxic to dogs.

Management tools like those above are not just necessary for safety, they are a great start for your dog to learn the right behaviour. The less they practice scavenging in food preparation and consumption areas, the less it becomes an ongoing habit.

For further behaviour and training assistance with your dog's scavenging habits, please contact us today to book a behaviour consultation with Katie.