

## Can Elevating Your Pet's Bowl Impact Their Health?

Elevated pet food bowls were once thought to prevent bloat, but research suggests otherwise. Here's what you need to know about elevated pet feeders, their pros and cons, and what to look for if you decide to buy one for your pet.

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Elevated food bowls, once believed to prevent bloat in dogs, are now linked to increased risk of gastric dilation volvulus (GDV) in large and giant breed dogs, according to veterinary research
- While elevated bowls can ease neck and joint stress for senior or arthritic dogs, they may be more expensive, complex to clean and do not guarantee neater eating habits
- Veterinarians recommend consulting an integrative veterinarian to determine if an elevated food bowl is appropriate, considering factors such as breed, size, bowl material, and stand design
- A study of 1,637 dogs found that approximately 20% to 52% of GDV cases in large and giant breeds were attributed to using raised feed bowls, challenging previous health claims
- Regular cleaning of pet food and water containers is crucial for pet health, with experts recommending washing food bowls after every meal and thoroughly cleaning water bowls every few days

When it comes to mealtimes, concerned pet parents always make sure that they're feeding a healthy, balanced and species-appropriate diet to their furry animal companions. But did you know that the choice of food and water bowl is important, too? If you choose the wrong containers, you could be exposing your pet to bacteria and other contaminants that they can ingest.

However, another recent trend that is fast becoming popular today is the use of elevated food bowls — as their name describes, these are dog feeders that are raised from the ground and elevated. The rationale behind this is it allows your pet to maintain proper posture while eating, which is said to help support their digestion. But is there any truth to these claims?

### Why Did Elevated Food Bowls Become Popular?

Today, elevated food bowls come in different designs and sizes, and are made from different materials like steel, wood or plastic. Some are adjustable, to suit your growing pet. They also come with single, double or sometimes even triple bowls.

Elevated food bowls rose in popularity after they were promoted to not only help improve your pet's posture, which could be highly beneficial for many breeds, but also improve digestion. In particular, elevated food bowls were said to prevent bloat in dogs — however, this isn't 100% true.

## The Claims About Elevated Food Bowls and Digestive Health Are Unclear

It was recently believed that using an elevated feeder helps prevent bloat — this refers to gastric dilation (GD) or gastric dilation volvulus (GDV), conditions more common in large, deep-chested breeds.

GD occurs when a pet ingests air during eating, and the stomach painfully fills with gas, while GDV is when the gas-filled stomach twists on itself and cuts off blood flow and circulation in the stomach. While treatable, failing to address bloat can be fatal.<sup>1,2</sup>

Initial claims noted that using raised bowls reduces the air ingested during eating, hence helping prevent bloat. However, studies have debunked these claims. In fact, research published in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association found that using elevated dog feeders actually increases the risk of GDV in large-breed and giant dogs.<sup>3</sup>

The study involved 1,637 dogs of different breeds, such as Great Dane, Akita, St. Bernard, Irish Setter and Rottweiler, to name a few. The researchers found that along with eating speed and a family history of GDV, using elevated dog feeders heighten the risk of bloat.

*“Approximately 20% and 52% of cases of GDV among the large breed and giant breed dogs, respectively, were attributed to having a raised feed bowl,” the researchers concluded.<sup>4</sup>*

## Pros and Cons of Using Elevated Pet Food Bowls

Still, this doesn't mean that elevated pet food bowls do not have any benefits. There are cases when these types of feeders can actually be useful.

One example is for dogs that are struggling with health problems like arthritis and back pain. Senior dogs that struggle to eat from ground-level food bowls may find it more comfortable to use elevated dog feeders. Other advantages of elevated dog bowls include:

- **Eases neck and joint stress**
- **Makes it easier for your pet to access their food**
- **Are sturdier and more stable than the usual pet bowls** (some are even designed to prevent tipping)

Elevated pet food bowls do have certain drawbacks as well. For one, they can be more expensive than traditional pet bowls, especially premium-grade models. Other disadvantages of using these products include:

- **More complicated to clean and maintain** — They have multiple pieces that require cleaning separately and can accumulate bacteria and dirt if not properly sanitized.
- **They don't prevent messy eating** — Water can still spill, and food pieces may fall from the bowl.

## Considerations When Choosing an Elevated Food Bowl

If you're still unsure whether an elevated food bowl is for your pet or not, it's best to consult with your pet's integrative veterinarian. They will help you determine the ideal feeding method and routine for your pet's breed and will provide insights if an elevated feeder is a good choice for your pet.

Once your veterinarian gives the go-signal, you should consider several factors before buying an elevated food bowl, such as:

- **The height of the raised bowl** — This is crucial; the bowl should be high enough for your pet to eat comfortably without putting added stress on their neck or back.

According to Animal Wised, to determine the ideal height of the elevated food bowl, measure your dog's height at the withers — this is the tallest point on your pet's body, without including their neck and head — and then subtract 15 centimeters.<sup>5</sup>

- **The material** — Stainless steel bowls are a great choice because of their durability. They are also easy to clean and are resistant to bacteria.
- **The design** — Consider the design of the stand; is it easy to clean and take apart? Is it easy to adjust? Are the legs thick enough to prevent it from tipping over? Check its sturdiness as well, and if it stays in place while your dog is eating.

Whether you end up choosing an elevated food bowl or not, there's one thing you should take note of — clean your pet's food water and food container regularly. Many pet parents don't do this regularly, which can put their pet's health at risk.

Experts recommend washing your pet's food bowls after every meal, regardless of the type of diet you're feeding them. Use hot, soapy water to wash food bowls, while water bowls should be wiped dry before refilling. Their water bowls should be thoroughly washed every couple of days or more often as necessary.

## Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [Hepper, August 22, 2024](#).

<sup>2</sup> [Consistent Reviews, October 13, 2024](#).

<sup>3,4</sup> [J Am Vet Med Assoc. 2000 Nov 15;217\(10\):1492-9](#).

<sup>5</sup> [Animal Wised, July 26, 2020](#).