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Reinforcer effectiveness in dogs – the influence of quantity and quality

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Highlights

- Dogs were trained to traverse a 20m runway for a food reward
- Either reward quantity or reward quality was altered
- There was no effect of food quantity (1 vs 5 pieces) on dogs' running speed
- Dogs ran significantly faster for the higher quality reward
- Reward quality appears more relevant for motivation than reward quantity

Abstract

Reinforcer effectiveness refers to the reinforcer's ability to control the subject's target behaviour and is therefore critical to training success. Yet animals' preferences, and the effectiveness of different rewards to function as reinforcers, are often assumed without scientific investigation. Here we explored the influence of reward quality, quantity and changes in reward value on motivation in domestic dogs. Subjects were trained to traverse a runway for a food reward. In Study 1, the quantity of food was varied (1 vs 5 pieces of dry food), while in Study 2, food quality was varied (1 piece of sausage vs 1 piece of dry food).

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