
PHYSICAL & MENTAL EXERCISE

Mom, I'm bored.

Dogs are a lot like children. If you don't give them something fun to do, they will make their own fun—and often not in ways you approve of.

Give your dog plenty of physical and mental exercise, and you get a happier, healthier, better-behaved dog. Well-exercised dogs bark less, chew less, sleep more, and rest easier if left home alone. They are also much less likely to rummage through the trash or attack the couch cushions.

What about leash walks?

Leash walks are great brainteasers because of all the sensory information dogs get from them, but they don't count as aerobic exercise. Your dog needs to run, swim, or do something else that gets his heart pumping for at least 30 minutes every day. Check out Sniffspot.com if you don't have a fenced yard for your dog to run in.

Workouts for the body.

Chasing a ball or Frisbee. Swimming. Playing tug. Active play with other dogs. Off-leash romps or hikes.

Workouts for the brain.

Work to eat. Biologically speaking, your dog is not supposed to have a bowl of kibble plunked down in front of him. He is a hunter by nature, meant to work for his keep. Mimic this by serving your dog's food in a Kong or treat ball. Your dog will spend the first part of the day figuring out how to get at his food and the rest of it recovering from the mental effort. Perfect!

Toys galore. Toys are a great way to engage your dog's brain. Dogs have distinctly individual toy preferences, depending on the day, time, and situation. Do some detective work and find out what truly tickles your dog.

The best toys have a purpose. They deliver food, present a challenge, squeak, or make themselves interesting in some other way. Some classics to consider: Rope toys, plush toys (with or without squeakers), Hide-A-Bee (Squirrel, Bird), tricky treat balls, soft rubber toys (vinyl), and hard rubber toys like Kongs and Nylabones.

Once you have a good selection, develop a toy strategy. Designate a popular toy for use only during alone time, like when you need to leave your dog in his crate, confinement area, or a spare room. Then, rotate the other toys daily to keep the novelty factor high.