

Games and Enrichment Activities

Most dogs need some sort of problem-solving activities to keep them from getting bored and getting into trouble. Whether it's after an injury, post-surgery from a spay or neuter, or just to keep an active pup busy, we hope these activities help you manage your pups energy levels for quick recovery or to maintain your sanity.

Scavenger Hunt

Take some paper bags or a roll of paper and crinkle it so that it has lots of grooves and folds, lay it out flat and scatter treats all over it and then roll it up in a tight ball for your dog to unpack.

You can also use a towel, lay it flat, put treats in a line as you roll it into a tight roll with the treats folded into it as you go. For added difficulty or to beat the heat, saturate it with water and freeze it!

Lick Mats

I love these for keeping any age dog busy for hours! You can even use it to keep your dog busy if you have to change a bandage or check for ticks. They come in all shapes and sizes, here's a link to the wobble bowl lick mat, one of our personal favorites.

<https://www.chewy.com/lickimat-wobble-bpa-free-rubber-dog/dp>

Snuffle Mats!

A personal favorite, this is a great way to keep a treat loving dog busy by teaching him to search and forage for his treats or dinner. If you have a dog recovering from surgery, this is a great way to feed his meals while stimulating his brain. They come in different sizes and shapes and can be washed and hung to dry. The sky's the limit on what you can hide in the loops, dry dog food, soft treats, freeze dried dog food pieces, tiny cookies, all of your dog's favorites.

<https://www.chewy.com/trixie-snuffle-mat-level-1-enrichment/dp>

Treat Stuffing Toys

This can be a Kong toy or any toy that you can fill with treats that spill out or your dog has to chew and lick and paw to get the treats out. The better the dog gets at it, the more the challenge is to fill it with a variety of treats and mixes to keep him busy for a long time. Here are some ideas of ones we've found that are easy to fill and sturdy.

<https://www.chewy.com/woof-party-pupsicle-treat-dispensing/dp>

<https://www.chewy.com/kong-classic-dog-toy/dp>

<https://www.chewy.com/west-paw-zogoflex-toppl-tough-treat/dp>

<https://www.chewy.com/planet-dog-orbee-tuff-snoop-treat/dp>

Cookie Toss Game

Take a treat and toss it for your dog and as she is eating it, turn in the other direction and toss the next cookie in the opposite direction. Bounce her back and forth so that her attention is drawn back to you and this game, rather than on anything else. This is a great game to get started in a quiet environment at first to help build up momentum and value for it so that eventually you can use it on walks or around big distractions.

Add this to the walking exercise anytime you need to re-focus your dog's attention away from something. Speed up the tosses if necessary to keep him focused on the game and you rather than the distraction (person, dog, noise, squirrel etc).

Hide and Seek

Take some treats and put them in paper bags and tape them with masking tape for your dog to find and unpack. You can make them as complicated as you want as this will keep her really busy out in the yard and prevent your dog from getting bored and barking or digging.

Alternatively, use treat stuffing toys and freeze them and toss them out into the yard for your dog to find and unpack while she is out there. If it's winter, you can toss them right in the snow for her to find. The rest of the year you can "hide" them around the yard for your dog to find and unpack. You might have to start off by showing her where they are hidden at first, but soon she will have a great way to occupy herself when she is outside.

Bucket Popsicle

Fill a container with water and all kinds of chews and treats and freeze it solid. Pop it out and give it to your dog outside or in a baby pool to keep them entertained for hours!

Alternatively, you can use plastic drink cups and freeze multiple ones at a time. This is great for smaller dogs or to put multiple small popsicles out at a time.

Sprinkler Toy

A great way to exercise in hot weather and wear your dog out while staying cool. Here's an article that reviews the best ones.

<https://www.activedogsports.com/splash-pads-for-dogs>

Pool Noodle Jumps

Get a bunch of pool noodles (you can also use PVC pipes or hula hoops) and rest them on top of bricks or books open like a tent, and have your dog jump over them. Find a way to raise them higher (maybe with two chairs) and call them over and under. Show your dog how to step over or wiggle under at first, and then stand on one side and call them using the treat as a lure to help them over.

FYI : You can buy hula hoops, pool noodles at the dollar store

Pool Noodle Games

Buy a bunch of pool noodles at the dollar store and arrange them from one end of hallway or room to another. Put your dog on leash and lead him over them while you toss food for him to find along the way. If he resists the leash then take it off and just use the treats to get him to follow you down the hallway. The idea is to get him to pick up his feet and step over them but whatever he does to start is fine, even if he's goofy and trips on them it is still helping him get in his body and become more aware of where he is in space. Scared dogs don't have a good handle on this and these types of games really help, plus they're fun and helps him learn trust you.

You can also make a big pile of the noodles and toss treats so they land in the pile and he has to go wade through it to find his goodies. Use really high value treats so he'll want to play with you, cold cut ends from the deli work great (roast beef, turkey, ham etc).

Bubble Gun Games

Get a battery-operated bubble gun and take your dog outside for some fun catching bubbles. Some dogs have to be coaxed at first but usually catch on quickly and chase down and bite at the bubbles while running and leaping and having a blast. Just be sure that the surface isn't slippery as many dogs get a little carried away with their bubble hunting and could slip and hurt themselves.

Digging Pit

Many dogs dig when they are hot and are looking to create a cool place to lay down or they are bored and looking to entertain themselves. It helps cut down on the destruction of your yard to address both needs. Buy a large umbrella to provide a shady corner in your yard and put a child's sandbox full of clean sand underneath it. Hide a variety of cookies, chewys and treat stuffed toys on top of and under the sand for your dog to search for. You may need to get your dog started so she knows they are there at first but soon she will be entertaining herself instead

of digging to the next town. If you get a sandbox with a cover, you can put the cover on in inclement weather and prevent it from becoming a mud pit.

Stair Games

Use a treat to guide him up a few stairs and turn him around so he's facing down. Put his leash and harness on so you can guide him and help him balance and then lure him down the stairs slowly by dropping your treat down on every other step. This might be hard for him because he has to learn to shift his weight back and control how fast he descends.

Most big dogs rush down the stairs to compensate for their weight being pitched forward, the more you can slow him down and help him problem solve coming down slowly the more aware of his body, the more you build confidence and help him problem solve and gain flexibility.

Build it slowly as it's quite a work out for dogs with little experience and likely he didn't get much in the way of freedom to climb and explore as a young pup so this might be very new to him.

You can also practice having him run up and down the stairs and then ask for "sit" or "down" as a verbal cue to work on combining moving/exercise with listening and remembering. This is a huge brain and body work out and will really tire him out.

Stair Recall Game

Call your dog up or down the stairs, having her sit on the landing or do some puppy push ups and then have a second person call her back and do the same.

If you have multiple flights of stairs you can leave her in a stay at the top, go to the first landing and call her, then have her sit and stay while you go down the next flight etc. until she gets to the bottom.

This is a great game to play in bad weather when she needs some exercise but it's too cold, too hot or too wet to go outside.

Chew Time

Dogs work out their emotions through chewing. The more you provide appropriate things to chew, the less likely your dog is to destroy things important to you and the more content they will be. Dogs who are restricted activity should have plenty of things to sink their teeth into so that they can heal quickly especially if they must be confined for extended periods of time.

Some ideas for safe things to chew

Etta Says

<https://www.chewy.com/etta-says-premium-elk-recipe-crunchy>

Cod Sticks

<https://www.chewy.com/icelandic-cod-long-chew-sticks-dog/dp/285343>

Buffalo Horns

<https://www.chewy.com/qt-dog-buffalo-hornz-water-buffalo/dp/713095>

No Hide

<https://www.chewy.com/earth-animal-no-hide-seasonal-pumpkin/dp/1221862>

Marrow Bones (uncooked)

<https://www.chewy.com/bones-chews-made-in-usa-roasted/dp/114674>