



Mental & Physical Exercises to Help Your Dog

As the companion to a large dog, I know firsthand that a bored dog can quickly deteriorate into a naughty dog! The gold standard in dog care is a minimum of one long walk each day. This exercises their body to be sure, but it also exercises their mind. As they sniff their way along from mailbox, to bush, to fire hydrant, they are learning lots of interesting facts about all the pets who have walked those steps before them. Health status, size, sex and general condition are all conveyed. It's pretty much your pooches chance to "read the morning paper," and see what's new and exciting in their world.

Inclement weather, physical limitations of the pet or the companion, and the changing seasons can all limit the number and length of these excursions. Dogs however, still need mental stimulation even when physical exercise is limited. At those times, they may even need mental stimulation more!

Try out some of these ideas to give your dog mental exercise and drive away the boredom-blues:

- If you're anything like me, your dog has more toys than you have shoes. One way to keep things interesting is to pack away half the toys and every week or so bring some new ones out, and put some away. It'll be like giving them something new all over again.
- Rotate the location of your dog's toys. If they have a favorite toy, I'd leave that wherever the pup would like it, but other toys can be moved to other rooms, giving them something "new" to discover.
- Most dogs love car rides, so if there's an errand which will keep you in the car (driving to a mailbox, going through a drive-through) or when you visit a pet store, try to bring your dog along. They'll enjoy the ride and the shopping!
- There are many interactive toys on the market, in which your dog has to "solve" a puzzle to open a flap for a treat. Dogs tend to learn these fairly quickly, but it's still some nice mental exercise to add to their day.
- Train your dog to play some simple games that you can do together. A favorite of mine is the "Find It" game where I hide treats (or just bits of leftover dry food) around the house and I tell my pup to "Find It" with a voice and gesture she recognizes. She's occupied for 10-15 minutes hunting all around for those small treats!
- When you do get out for a walk, change up the route you take, which side of the street you walk on, and the length of time you're out. Each variation will stimulate their brain.
- Invest in a Kong toy, and fill it with treats or food. If you're concerned about weight-gain, scoop out a bit of their breakfast and use it to fill the Kong. These toys can occupy dogs for quite a while as they work to dig out the treats and chew, chew, chew!
- Don't ever believe that "you can't teach an old dog, a new trick." You surely can! Teach them a new trick or two, and then practice it periodically. Just running through a handful of tricks is a great way to keep them mentally alert.
- Give your pet a spa day! A quiet time together, complete with a brushing from head to toe, a belly rub and whatever else your pooch enjoys, can translate to a relaxing bonding experience for both of you.

In addition, love can also chase boredom away. So find your own way to enjoy your companion every day, just as they enjoy hanging out with you!