

Enrichment Activities for Your Dog

Some dogs, when their physical activity is diminished due to illness, injury, or age, it can be important to address their needs for increased mental stimulation. Emotional and mental enrichment can help your pet avoid depression or boredom while their mobility or other abilities are limited. Enrichment activities can also help boost your pet's ability to cope with chronic pain or anxiety.

- Find new ways to “take a walk” for your dog to engage with the neighborhood:
 - Take your pet for drives around the neighborhood, with the window partially down (if they enjoy being in the car!)
 - Use a wagon to go for “wagon walks”; or a doggie stroller if your pet is small enough
 - Go to a park and set up a spot where you and your pet can sit comfortably to watch the action; maybe bring your dog's favorite bed so they know it's okay to just lie down; have a picnic or read a book while your dog enjoys the fresh air. Alternatively – go to a café with dog-friendly outdoor seating, bring a bed or blanket for your dog to rest comfortably.
 - Build up a dog bed in front of a window; help your dog up and down from it to let them safely watch the world outside. Consider placing a bird feeder just outside of your window to make it more interesting!
- If your dog likes toys, introduce new toys or games regularly, to help hold their interest. Buy a new toy every week so the novelty remains exciting. Interactive toys, such as puzzle toys or treat toys and kongs are great for some dogs; the PetSafe brand makes quite a few, like the Busy Buddy or Squirrel Buddy. A “Snuffle Mat” can also be a fun way to hide treats!
- Make your own games at home, like "hunting", hide treats around the house and have him hunt to find them (you can make this fairly easy – the point is not to challenge your dog too much, if they lose interest or get tired easily). Or, put treats in a muffin tin and

place a tennis ball over the treats, watch while they figure out how to remove the ball and which ones have treats.

- You can play modified versions of tug or fetch, letting them play with a tug rope or rolling the ball to where they're lying down.
- Work with them to learn new tricks that they can do while sitting or lying down, like identifying different toys by their names – learning new tricks can be powerfully engaging, stimulating, and rewarding for the dog.

Sometimes introducing a few new activities like this at home can help curtail stress behaviors like chewing, pacing, barking, and generally can help avoid depression. Try to preempt the moments when they would usually start showing boredom behaviors, or if you see them start, bring out a new toy to hold their interest instead, head outside for a wagon walk, or distract with an indoor game.

“Together time” can also be important for engaging your pet’s emotional wellbeing. You already spend a lot of time with your pet, but take a step out of your routine, set a timer for 20 minutes, and just sit with your pet; give them a massage, rest your head by theirs, talk calmly, read a book out loud, etc. Let this be a time without stress or uncertainty, let go of any lingering questions like “is there more we should be doing,” “are they in pain,” “I wish they would eat more,” etc, and just **be** with your pet in the moment.