

MENTAL STIMULATION ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR DOG

Providing your dog with opportunities to rehearse natural behaviors and that challenge their minds is just as important as finding exercises that challenge their bodies. These activities can be use to supplement more physical work and are great options when the weather makes working outside uncomfortable.

ACTIVITY	HOW TO	TIPS	BENEFITS
Scentwork	Put something with a unique odor (cooking spices are a great option!), once your dog sniffs it celebrate with treats and praise. Once they understand that odor gets them “paid”, start hiding it in different spots around the house.	YouTube is full of great videos on how to train scentwork at home. Agility Possibilities offers structured classes for dogs of all levels.	Mental stimulation; allows a dog to capitalize on their natural behaviors
Puzzle toys	Use toys that hide treats and require your dog to figure out how to release them.	See below for tips on making at-home puzzle toys and slow feeder options with stuff you probably have around the house! **	Keeps your dog mentally engaged and reduces boredom.
Slow Feeder Toys	Similar to puzzle toys, but even when your dog ‘figures them out’ they still have to work hard to get to the food.		
Hide and Seek	Hide treats, toys, or even yourself and encourage your dog to find them.	Start easy and reward your dog heavily (ie. Lots of treats! Make it a party!) in the beginning until they figure out the game!	Sharpens problem-solving skills and it is a great bonding activity
Snuffle Mats*	Placing a handful of treats or kibble on a mat that your dog has to ‘snuffle’ around in to find them.	DIY options: Throw treats on a towel and scrunch it up, fill a box with packing paper and toss in a handful of kibble or throw treats around your lawn (assuming its pesticide and fertilizer free).	Practice natural foraging behavior; mental stimulation
Training different cues/commands	Spend 5-10 minutes a day teaching your dog something new or brushing up on old commands!	Once your dog has mastered the basic obedience commands (ie. Sit, stay, come, etc.), don’t be afraid to work on fun ‘party’ trick commands like ‘pick a card’ or ‘roll over’. (YouTube has lots of tutorials!)	Mental Stimulation, Bonding, & Focus.

***The Power of Sniffing** - While it may not look like exercise, sniffing is an incredibly stimulating activity for dogs. A “sniffari” walk—where you alternate between walking and stopping for your dog to explore and sniff—can be more tiring for your furry friend than a long, uninterrupted walk because it activates additional work centers in their brains!

**** Engaging Puzzle Toys for Your Dog**

Looking for fun and budget-friendly ways to keep your dog entertained? Puzzle toys can be a great solution! Here are a few simple ideas to stimulate your pup's mind and keep them happy:

1. **DIY Treat Dispenser:** Take an old towel or a worn-out shirt, tie it up, and hide some treats inside. Your dog will love the challenge of figuring out how to get the goodies out!
2. **Pie Tin Challenge:** Use pie tins as makeshift puzzles. Place a treat in each tin and keep adding treats as your dog finishes the last one. It keeps them engaged and makes mealtime fun!
3. **Cupcake Tray Puzzle:** Use a cupcake tray to create a fun challenge! Place treats in the cups and cover them with balls or other toys. Your dog will have to figure out how to move the toys to get to the treats.
4. **Toilet/paper towel rolls:** Put kibble/treats in empty cardboard roles and pinch the ends – allow your dog to shred and tare to get at the prize.