

Living with Dogs

Positive Training Fetches Positive Results!

Sandi Pensinger, Canine Coach

How much exercise does my dog really need?

The amount of physical exercise a dog needs varies by breed and age. A young Labrador, Golden or Border Collie for example, would be difficult to tire no matter how long you walk! We usually pay attention to physical exercise and ignore mental stimulation for our pets ... a critical component of exercise! This leads to boredom, and boredom leads to destructiveness.

Provided your dog is getting two or three good walks a day (or a trip to the dog park), focus more on adding mental stimulation to your dog's daily routine.

Imagine if you had to sit in an empty room, alone, all day long ... nothing to read, no computer, no television and no games. You'd probably go a little crazy yourself, it's not surprising that your dog may get bored and resort to chewing up the furniture!

Mental stimulation of dogs is easy and fun! Here are a few helpful hints to help get you started:

- Provide your dog with toys that make them think, like a Kong toys stuffed with food and peanut butter, or one of the many varieties of treat puzzle balls or "Intellitoyz" available at your local pet supply store or from catalogs or the internet (look for the Buster Cube, Giggle and Peek Treat Ball, Intellicube, the Intellibone, Hide-A-Squirrel, Hide-A-Bird and Hide-A-Bee!)
- Rotate your dog's toys. Constant access to the same items makes them lose their value (just think about kids with new Christmas toys and how they sit unused a mere two weeks later)!
- Play stimulating games like "Hide the Cookie". Confine your dog to another part of the house while setting up this game. Take tiny bits of treats and hide them everywhere it is OK for him put his nose - under the coffee table, on a lower shelf of the bookcase, etc. (I prefer Solid Gold Tiny Tots or Jerky treats for this game since they are not greasy and are easy to break up.) Now release your dog from his temporary confinement and say, "Find the Cookie!" At first, stand near the places you have hidden the tidbits and let them sniff them out. Soon your dog will catch on to the game and you and your family can sit back and watch the fun! Your dog won't know when he's found all the hidden treats so you can keep this game going for a while! Voila, doggy calculus!
- Try some of the dog sports such as agility, freestyle, tracking, flyball and Rally-O!
- There's an old saying, "A good dog is a tired dog". Just remember to keep his activities in balance. Physical exercise and mental stimulation are both necessary to keep your dog happy and non-destructive!