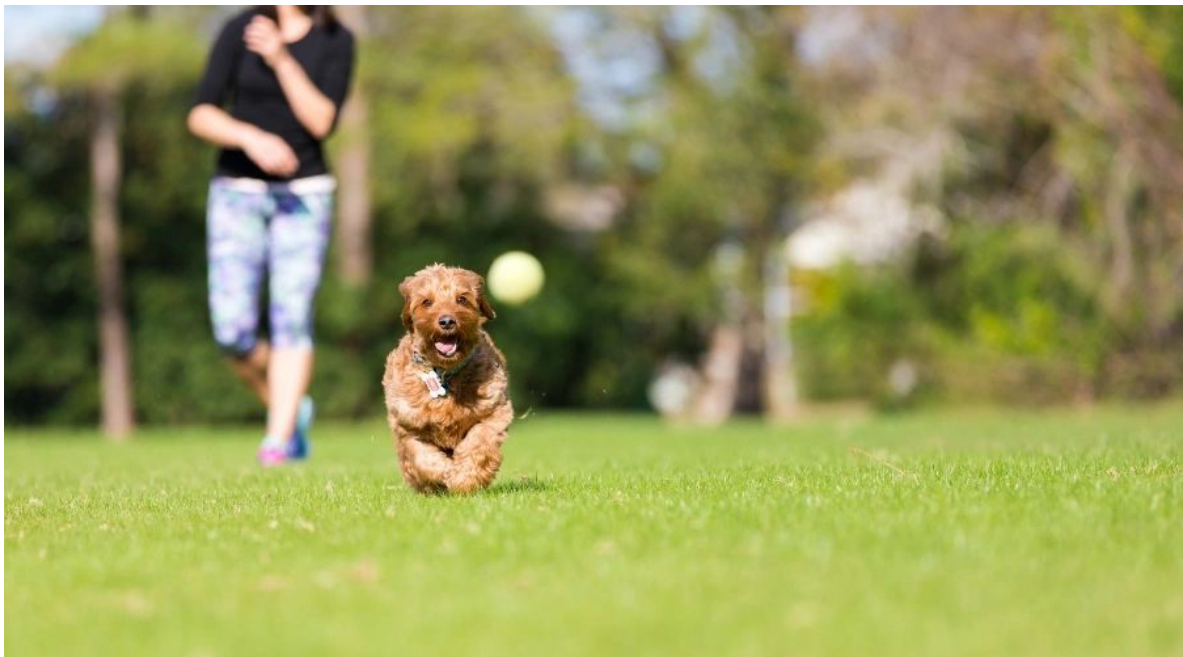


But all dogs LOVE to play fetch? Right?

## LARGE PRINT BLOG VERSION

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**Simple answer- not necessarily.** And when people apply to us to adopt, and one of their 'requirements' is the the dog likes to

play 'fetch' even/especially with your kids, then think again and read on.

And remember, *no rescue can guarantee that a dog will love to fetch*, or even if it's good for them. Most rescues only use kennels and don't have the time or facilities to check if they even like fetch. Our rescue is foster based, sure, and we can often find out this information for you by trying them with balls or frisbees (but check them for cracks or sharp edges before you use them) or other toys (like flirt poles which kill shelter dogs can get confused with the vile pole and stick the dog catchers use to catch the dogs we rescue from the kill cages, so we usually advise against those even if the dog you're adopting was never in the kill cages) used to only play fetch. **But throwing a ball or other toy is a tiny part of being a dog's foster or forever human, and it is human attitudes to all of what we humans think of as 'proper dog activity' that need to change.**



a typical flirt pole

We can help you with that. How do you think we found all this stuff out? By being in rescue for years as well as becoming qualified in canine welfare and behaviour to best help all our dogs lead happy and fulfilled lives. Let us help you :) what do you have to lose except a few preconceptions? Please believe us when we say there's WAY more to 'fetch' than what you've seen as

ideal dog activity on TV and in films. Or shown to you by your parents. Every year we learn more about how dogs work and your knowledge can always be updated!

### **What does fetch mean in your head?**

Of course, it is generally known that fetch can be one of the 'best' games out there for fostering *healthy communication between a dog and their human*, as it provides physical and mental stimulation for dogs, and for training a dog with real life rewards (instead relying on treats that may not work if where they and you are is (over) exciting or stressing them out). But just like relying on treat training, only doing fetch with your dog as their 'job' has its downsides too. You could play differently with your dog instead/ as well ([play blog](#)) and add alternative ways to first bond such as grooming (but not too much, and only if it clearly relaxes them when you first try) ([grooming blog](#)) as well as providing safe spaces to wind down/for

decompression after play, and using your body language and positions to let them know play time is over and they can go and chill after such activity, like in our play blog here ([using your body to bond/play blog.](#))

But bottom line, *playing fetch with your dog cheers YOU up the most.* For you *playing fetch provides YOU with entertainment* and companionship with your dog.

["Dogs provide us with the perfect outlet](#) after a long day or week at work to let off some steam and just have fun. Similar to the benefits of walking your dog, studies have shown that spending quality play time with them provides you with a number of health benefits:"

- Releases endorphins in your brain (the feel good chemicals!)
- Stimulates your creativity and productivity
- Increases your brain functionality and memory
- Provides you with stress relief

- Prevents burnout in you
- Improves sleep for you

“Many people are put off by the thought of exercise or going to the gym, which is why playing with your dog can be a fun way for you to burn some calories without feeling like you’re working too hard.

”

or “if you’ve had a long day at the office, playing fetch with your dog when you get home is an excellent activity for you to destress as well. It’s a time when you can step away from your phone, social media, and any other stressors to concentrate on your dog.” ”

But all of this thinking *is about you and not your dog*. There's *nothing wrong with wanting to be happy when you engage with your dog*, but you must also think of how your dog interprets how and when you engage with them.

So be honest with yourself, are you *playing fetch with your dog more for your benefit, or theirs?* It can be both, of course, but *only in moderation, only if it's appropriate for the breed mix (of the dog) and for the appropriate time of day or task they're already doing* (such as going for a walk, or being in the garden, at bedtimes), and always alongside other activities that *give dogs a choice* on how they want to play with you, or by themselves, or with other dogs. Just like using walks as your ***main way to bond with a dog (walks blog) so they think that's the only way they're going to get quality/solo time with you can stress them out***, so can only playing fetch with your dog.

Sure, fetch can replace activities they may have done in the wild, and challenge and stimulate their happy brain chemicals as they're fulfilling instinct drives... but **NOT ALL DOGS**. And bear in mind we have bred dogs to discourage or enhance these 'instincts'. For sure, "the primary reason dogs love fetch is that it simulates the act of

chasing prey," says Jennifer Malawey, a certified professional dog trainer. "When a wolf brings food home to the pack, it's the same root behaviour that drives a dogs like Golden Retrievers, bred to be 'gun dogs', to feel fulfilled when they bring back a hunting kill for their humans, to also fetch a tennis ball."

***And thinking all dogs must play fetch to be a 'real' dog is outdated thinking that needs to stop.***

*Mix up play with your dog.* For many dogs for example, lick or snuffle mats can be another way to engage with them, though not all dogs like or have the breed (mix) instincts to want to use them. And we have lots more advice on this in our walks and play blogs.





A typical snuffle mat. You can even make one yourself out of old blankets!

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## **What does fetch mean in your dog's head?**

On the plus side, it can be 'easy exercise' for dogs and humans, especially humans with limited mobility. Beyond satisfying your dog's *retrieving instinct if they have one*, fetch can also give them plenty of exercise. Plus, you don't have to do any running or jumping yourself, it can be done from a

wheelchair or bench and can be teamed with teaching your dog recall. Our non profit shop has automatic ball throwers we call 'flingies' that can help humans to throw a ball for a dog but use them with care and please read this blog first.

Fetch can also work your dog mentally in a good way, as your dog's sense of sight and smell are linked in their brains. Did you know this means even blind or deaf dogs can enjoy fetch with balls in the right environment?

But please be informed! If you know your dog's breed (mix) look up if their breed(s) even are likely to want to fetch. ***Are they doing it because it means they get some quality time with you or do they really like it? Are they actually excited to do it or stressed? They present***

***excitement and stress in a very similar way*** so you may be misreading your dog (See our blogs on body language, [like this one](#) here).

**Some breed (mixes) that tend to enjoy fetch the most** (but there are no hard and fast rules and remember a lot of pedigrees end up in rescue because they 'failed' puppy tests for their breeds, so they got dumped at a rescue, as the breeder had no 'use' for them.) These are usually but not always 'gun dogs'. And while in theory all dogs can learn to fetch, it's not always the best activity for their breed (mixes.)

Labrador/ Retriever

Australian Shepherd

English Springer Spaniel

English Whippet

Belgian Malinois (but they can get

obsessed if they don't have a wide range of

activities due to boredom)  
German Shorthaired Pointer  
Weimaraner  
Standard Poodle



[A young adult Retriever](#)

Do note that, firstly, ***fetch is never the only game you should play with these dogs***, and secondly, perhaps surprisingly, Collies and other 'herding dogs' <https://>

[www.akc.org/dog-breeds/herding/](http://www.akc.org/dog-breeds/herding/) are not on this list, so you'll need to activate their need for activity with something else wherever possible. *Incorrectly channelling an instinct, or breed enhanced trait in your dog can cause mental health and neurological damage long term.*

**Some breed (mixes) who *can* become OCD about fetch** (see below for more info on this, usually but not always herding dogs)

Collies

Corgis

Briards, Schipperkes and other terrier herding dogs

Norwegian Buhunds, Finnish Lapphunds and Swedish Vallhunds

Mudis

Kelpies

Heelers



A border collie

**Dog breed (mixes) who aren't bred to 'fetch' like this at all**

St Bernards (bred to find things but not bring them back)

Mastiffs

Bassets (bred for scenting)

Maltese

Great Danes (plus their size means fetch can put extra stress on joints)

Brachycephalic dogs like pugs and bulldogs can overheat and have breathing issues with this activity



[A Basset hound pup](#)

***This is by no means an exhaustive guide, and of course there are always exceptions to this, especially in cross breeds.***

**What happens to a dog's body when they fetch?**

If the above hasn't convinced you to find other/a wider range of quality time activities to do with your dog then read on. You may actually be hurting your dog.

## *Physical*

They may end up getting bored with the same game all the time, not be a of a breed that 'naturally gets' fetch, or don't like the throwing object you are using.

There are also growing concerns about how damaging such 'fetch' games could be for your dog and the British Veterinary Association stated in 2016 that throwing sticks at dogs especially is potentially life-threatening.

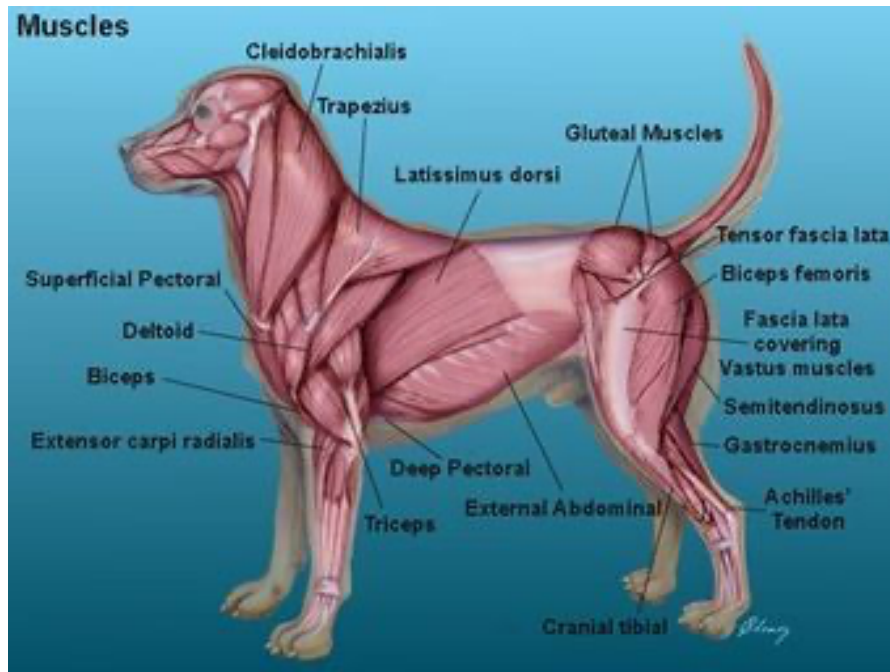




""According to the UK veterinary charity [PDSA](#), they see stick-related injuries across their 51 UK practices every week. Injuries from sticks may not be immediately apparent; for example Maya, a smooth collie, did not show any signs of distress after a walk where she chased sticks, but some time later, she became subdued and wouldn't eat. According to her adopter, Cathy Pryde: "We took her to the vet and they sedated her and then pulled out this long stick from her throat. We had no idea

that was the problem. There had been no blood or any other clues." The 4-inch (10cm) long stick had punctured her tongue and displaced her voice box. Even worse was what happened to poor Rudi the spaniel <https://www.vets-now.com/2017/12/sticks-dangers-to-dogs/> so please be super careful with throwing objects for your dogs, especially sticks. But it's not just sticks... balls can also stick in the throat, and frisbees are made of hard plastic that can shatter and get stuck in their throats as well.

Not only that, the action of fast running and suddenly coming to a stop can also have *damaging effects on a dog's soft tissues, especially with a pup that's still growing*. Constantly sprinting, leaping in the air, and changing direction can put a tremendous amount of *stress on your dog's joints* and long term can contribute to conditions like arthritis or hip dysplasia. These days, canine arthritis experts recommend that dogs with arthritis stop chasing balls altogether.



A dog's muscles for example need size and breed (mix) appropriate play and exercise to keep them strong, not overexert them

Experts believe that the most dangerous part of chasing a ball is braking—when your dog suddenly pitches their weight forward. What's more, if your dog injures one of their legs, they could easily shift their weight to another leg without you noticing. And once your dog starts to overcompensate, their overworked tissues

are more likely to take damage.

### *Mental*

Mental responses in dogs, and like us, are often linked to the physical too of course.

***NEVER rely on only one way with bonding with your dog.*** Especially if you've not tried all the bonding activities there are out there to find out which ones your dog likes best. Even worse, some dogs may become *obsessed with fetch* to the point where they don't want to play anything else. They may even keep going when they're exhausted or hurt. " says Lynda Taylor, a dog behaviourist who wrote the excellent Depend On Dogs <https://dependondogs.com> This can lead to physical collapse, dehydration, and even heatstroke, in hot weather!"



***So how can we make those expectations meet in the middle? Here the answer is simple- be more dog. Is there a safe way to play fetch with dogs (once you've worked out they genuinely like doing it)?***



Of course! But do try adjusting how you play fetch by using [these recommendations](#):

- *“Warm up your dog:* Just like you warm up before starting an intense workout, give your dog time to build up to a more intense fetch session. Make sure their muscles have had a gentle work out first using other activities that don’t get them too excited.
- *Adjust your angle:* Throw the ball or toy

low to the ground to keep your dog from jumping and twisting. If you're using an automatic ball thrower, try adjusting it to a lower angle.

- *Level the playing field:* Only play fetch on flat surfaces, so your dog won't trip over holes in the ground or a bunched-up rug. And never throw a ball indoors on Lino or laminate.
- *Combine it with **obedience**:* For added mental stimulation, try using fetch to reinforce other behaviours. For example, if you're teaching your dog "down," ask them to lie down before you throw the ball. Or use it to help with focusing your dog on you and link to the command word "wait". And link to a "come" cue to get them to associate with bringing it back and recall training. You can also use 'fetch' words as cues such as "fetch" (!), "go get", "mush" etc. And don't forget, cues like "loose" or "drop it".
- ***Take breaks:*** Remember to take breaks throughout your session, especially if it's hot, and have water on standby.

- ***Set a limit:*** Restrict the amount of time you play fetch every day to keep the game from becoming too repetitive or trigger stacking your dog. You can also play fetch at random times, without a set schedule, to keep it fresh and exciting."

A good [step by step guide](#) to see if dogs like fetch, or can be positively trained to fetch as one of their activities, or how to mix it with other 'jobs' and play can be found here.

And never only have one way to bond, play or engage with your dog! Only having one way to get them to come back to you will not help get them back under control should they get scared on a walk and bolt, or if they've suddenly seen a cat, squirrel or other small furry, or if they smell something that to them is delicious. Your dog will thank you for it, and you'll end up with an even



better relationship with your dog as well as avoiding long term physical and mental health issues.

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