

Why is Mental enrichment is so important

It's widely known that dogs require regular physical exercise to maintain a healthy weight and for overall well-being.

But some owners forget that pets also require **mental stimulation** just as much as physical activities.

Over the last few decades, [many studies](#) have demonstrated why mental stimulation is critical no matter the dog's age. Today, experts universally agree that there's a strong correlation between the lack of stimulation of different sensory receptors and several mental illnesses in dogs, such as depression or severe anxiety.

Here are the top 10 reasons why you should take your dog's mental stimulation more seriously:

1. **Alleviate Boredom**

Dog owners who need to be away from home all day find that their dogs can go through separation anxiety, which expresses itself through a variety of behavioral problems.

Your dog misses you, and that's part of the problem. But [the real reason](#) why your dog might start tearing up your house or barking excessively is boredom. A bored dog needs to find a way to amuse himself. Making sure that your dog has interactive toys that mentally stimulate him, including food puzzles and other games to keep him occupied during the day is the easiest way to alleviate that boredom.

2. **It's Necessary for Happiness**

Going closely together with boredom, mental stimulation can stave off depression in dogs and keep them happier, according to research. Dogs, especially working breeds and generally very active breeds, need far more mental stimulation than dogs that are likely to be couch potatoes.

3. **Help Lessen Hyperactivity**

There's only so many activities dogs can partake in by themselves. If your dog is at home most of the day with nothing to occupy the mind, it's likely he'll be bursting with energy. Hyperactivity can sometimes be just a nuisance, until it turns into a more severe problem.

Your pet's energy levels will depend on the breed, age and health condition. But regardless, your dog needs to work off that energy, and getting him outdoors is usually the way to go. Going for walks, or trips to the dog park combined with games and stimulating toys are some of the scientifically proven ways to [calm down a dog](#) and keep your Fido mellow.

4. **Its a Brain Workout**

Just like your dog's muscles will get weak and atrophy without enough exercise, your dog's brain needs daily stimulation to avoid premature aging.

It's proven that dogs who aren't well mentally stimulated throughout their lives are more prone to cognitive dysfunctions as they get older. Just a simple interactive toy with treats in it that allows your pooch to figure out the puzzle will do a lot of good.

5. **Lower Aggression**

Proper mental stimulation will lower the dog's tendency to be aggressive. Bored dogs are cranky dogs, and cranky dogs are more likely to be aggressive towards people and other animals, according to research. Making sure that your dog is getting enough mental stimulation is especially important if you have other pets or kids at home.

6. **Lower Stress**

Stress can cause a lot of health problems in humans, and the same applies to dogs. Statistically, dogs who are aren't getting enough mental stimulation are likely to suffer from stress, which leads to higher rates of anxiety and depression. Consequently, this also shows in the form of higher rates of behavioral issues and physical problems.

7. **Get Rid Of Destructive Behavior**

Dogs who aren't getting the mental stimulation they need can chew furniture, destroy things, bark incessantly, and display other types of destructive behavior. PETA [reports](#) that one of the major reasons why dogs are getting rehomed is destructive behavior. If only these pets would've received proper amount of mental stimulation, it's likely half of those cases could've been solved right away.

8. **Keep Older Dogs Mentally Healthy**

Senior dogs in particular will need a lot of mental stimulation as their brain activity deteriorates. While the major deciding factor for a senior dog's mental health will be how much stimulation he's gotten throughout life, it's just as important not to negate it in his last years. It may be more difficult with older dogs, but puzzle toys with treats and socialization are the two best ways to stimulate them.

9. **Teach Young Puppies Good Habits**

Playtime, socialization, mentally stimulating games and toys are crucial for young dogs in their early years of development. [New study shows](#) that it makes puppies more confident, and teaches them proper behavior and give them an outlet for their extra energy. They will learn healthy habits and how not to engage in destructive behaviors, and sets them up for a life with less cognitive problems.

10. **Bond With Your Dog**

Playing fetch or puzzle games with your dog, taking your dog to a dog park, and working on tasks like agility training and command training will improve the bond between you and your Fido. While there's no evidence, many pet owners are here to conclude that the stronger that bond, the less likely it is that your dog will act out or misbehave. And really any activity can be turned into a fun game that will keep your occupied and mentally stimulated.

The Best Mental Stimulation Activities for Dogs

Some of the best ways to make sure that your dog is getting the important mental stimulation it needs each day are anything from interactive toys and puzzle feeders, to [agility training](#), obedience training, taking the dog to a dog park, or playing games where your pooch has to figure out an action in order to get a treat reward.

Doggie Day Care or Dog Walker

If you don't have time to check in on your dog during the day but you're worried that your dog isn't getting enough mental stimulation, consider enrolling your dog in a doggie daycare. In these facilities, your Fido will get the mental stimulation it needs from specially organized games and activities done by professionals, playing with other dogs, and getting the chance to get out of the house for a while.

Doggie daycare isn't cheap. If you can't make it home to take your dog for a walk and daycare is not an option or is too expensive, you can hire a dog walker (dog sitter) to come in and take the dog out for a nice walk and some playtime during the day.

How to Keep Your Dog Mentally Stimulated During the Day

If you must work all day, like most people, there are plenty of toys and games you can leave set up for your dog to provide mental stimulation. Some toys are much better than the others, however.

Treat stuffed toys, where the dog must work out a puzzle to get a treat, are very popular and good for dogs. You can also use a special feeder that dispenses food after the dog figures out a puzzle so that to get a meal during the day the dog needs to work out the puzzle.

Hiding toys and treats around the house is another way to keep dogs mentally stimulated throughout the day. Make sure that you are switching up the toys that you leave out for your dog to provide a little extra stimulation. Look for interactive toys that your dog likes but aren't easy to figure out.

There are also DVDs and live streaming videos on YouTube that you can leave on for your dog to watch. These videos use stimulating images and music or sound to keep a dog's mind occupied throughout the day. Leaving these DVDs or videos on during the day can provide excellent entertainment and stimulation for dogs, but whether your dog enjoys it will depend on your individual pet.

Studies, references and further reading:

- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15925696/>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3406045/>
- <https://topdogtips.com/aggression-in-dogs-science/>
- <http://agris.fao.org/agris-search/search.do?recordID=US9635032>
- <http://veterinaryrecord.bmj.com/content/169/15/388>