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# STAY-AT-HOME ENRICHMENT

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Stay-at-home enrichment activities are suitable for any dog to try as an addition to regular exercise, or as a substitution for those dogs that cannot be exercised due to illness or injury, cannot be walked for the safety of themselves or others, or for dogs whose owners are unable to exercise them.

When determining the best suited enrichment activity for your dog, you will first need to observe how your dog interacts with its environment. You then need to develop activities to enhance the environmental and behavioural opportunities for your dog in its daily activities. Your dog is more likely to succeed at activities that it naturally finds enjoyable. The ideas provided are by no means an exhaustive list, and not all activities will be suited to all dogs or situations. It is important that you trial different ideas, under supervision initially, to determine what works best for you and your dog.

## AIM

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- Ask your dog to earn a reward by using different parts of their brain
- Mentally stimulate your dog whilst teaching it new behaviours
- Keep your dog settled despite minimising exercise and/or changing their routine

## RECOMMENDED ITEMS

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- Toys your dog enjoys
- Cardboard boxes, KONG original toy (or another brand of hollow, rubber, washable toy)
- Plastic cup(s)
- Small treats your dog likes (no larger than the size of your little fingernail)
  - Try to avoid or minimise fatty treats (eg butter, cheese, meat fat, kabana, ham) that can cause digestive problems such as pancreatitis
- Wet or dry dog food
- Boiled chicken
- Diced carrot, sweet potato, or other dog-safe vegetables
- Spreadable toppings e.g. marmite or peanut butter (MUST NOT contain xylitol as toxic for dogs)
- Chews e.g. sheep/pig/cow ear (can cut with secateurs), vet-advised dental chew, natural rawhide

**NOTE:** if your dog is allergic or intolerant to any of the above foods, please substitute for an appropriate alternative and ONLY use food that is safe for your individual dog. If you are unsure, please consult your veterinarian.

## PREPARATION

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- Choose an area of the house or garden where you are happy for your dog to eat and get food on.
- Multi-dog households may require dogs to be physically separated for enrichment if:
  - There is ANY food-related aggression.
  - There is ANY resource-guarding aggression i.e. aggression over you, your friends, or a member of your family when interacting with any of the dogs.
  - When together, their arousal levels increase to a point where they no longer listen i.e. they get over-excited.
  - One dog is more confident or quicker than others and consistently gets the food reward faster, making it less enriching or unfair for the other dog(s).
- Supervise your dog during these games/exercises to ensure they remain safe.

## TECHNIQUES

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### *Food Scatters:*

Food scatters can be used in addition, or as a replacement, to meals.

- Grab a handful or portion of dry food/kibble and throw it over a grassy or textured surface (e.g. shagpile rug or snuffle mat)
  - Your dog has to use its nose to find their food before eating.
- Rub the food into the surface so it embeds lower down to increase the difficulty once your dog understands the activity

**NOTE:** Routines are very important to dogs, particularly if they are anxious, so if using at meal-times, please still provide some food in your dog's bowl for consistency in addition to the scattered ration.

### *Hide & Seek:*

Best used for dogs who know 'Fetch/Get It' with toys and understands a short 'Stay/Wait' cue.

- Grab a toy your dog likes, and whilst holding it in your dog's sight, ask it to 'Stay/Wait'.
- Walk a few steps away whilst your dog continues to watch you and place the toy on the ground.
- Walk back to your dog and ask 'Where's (insert toy name here!)' or 'Get It!' in an excited voice.
  - Your dog should find the toy and bring it back to you.
  - If it does not, you can hide a treat in or on the toy until your dog understands the game.
- You can reward your dog with praise, 'yes', food, and/or a tug game when they find the toy, and again when they bring it back to you.
- Move out of your dog's line of sight but remain close (e.g. around a corner, behind some furniture, or through a doorway), place the toy on the ground, and ask your dog to 'come' and find the toy whilst you remain near the toy.
  - Reward your dog when it finds the toy and brings it back to you.
- Repeat the above step, but this time walk back to your dog before asking them to 'Get It!'
- Over time, you can gradually extend the length of their 'Stay/Wait' and make the toy more difficult for them to find so they have to use their nose (in addition to their sight) to find it.
  - Examples include getting your dog to wait inside whilst you hide the toy outside, hiding the toy underneath an object such as a blanket or box, hiding the toy up high such as on a chair
- Eventually, you can teach your dog the names of their different toys, and only reward them when they bring back the toy that you have asked for.

### *Chewing Toys:*

- Toys such as the original KONG are useful as washable, chewable toys that come in different rubber formulations and colours depending on the kind of chewer your dog is:
  - Puppy pink or blue for puppies;
  - Classic red for general chewers;
  - Extreme black for power chewers;
  - Senior purple for older dogs or those with tender mouths.
  - Visit [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-A9pL7\\_3do](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-A9pL7_3do) to determine if your dog is a gentle, average, or power chewer.
- These toys can be used in 'Fetch/Get It' games as they bounce in an unpredictable way, which increases exercise and stimulation.
  - It may, however, make them more unsuitable for inside throwing games!

- When stuffed with food, they encourage chewing and licking, which in turn helps decrease your dog's stress<sup>(1)</sup>.
  - Start by using small treats and/or dry dog food packed loosely in the KONG so that they easily fall out as your dog plays with it.
    - This will help your dog to understand the basics of how to use the toy.
  - When they are proficient at this, you can make the KONG more difficult to extract the food from by:
    - Filling it with softer foods (see examples above) mixed with the firmer foods
    - Stuffing it in layers e.g. hard treats at bottom, spread, dry dog food, soft treat, then a chew sticking out the top as a handle.
  - Some dogs can then move up to toys filled with soft food (or soaked dry food) frozen overnight for a longer-lasting chew.
    - This is also great for hot days.
  - Visit [www.kongcompany.com](http://www.kongcompany.com) for some great KONG stuffing recipe ideas!

### Training:

When your dog is rewarded for displaying the correct behaviour, it increases their confidence through positive reinforcement. Things that dogs find rewarding include food, toys, games, praise/attention, and patting/massage. Positive reinforcement has been associated with the least amount of undesirable behaviours when compared to other training methods<sup>(2)</sup>.

- Practicing cues your dog already knows can be great for their memory, and can help prevent cognitive decline in older dogs. Learning new behaviours is also a great form of mental stimulation that can enrich your dog's life.
  - Remember to keep sessions short e.g. 3-5 minutes, and only practise the behaviour a few times in a row before moving on to another behaviour or giving your dog a quick break (e.g. 10 seconds to process the new information).
  - If possible, try to end the training session on a high (a try they get right), however if your dog is getting worse with each attempt, then stop immediately as continuing will only increase confusion and frustration for both of you!

### Tug Games and Fetch:

Even if not being walked, games can be played inside and outside the house, depending on your individual circumstances.

- Fetch can be played inside if you have a long hallway and small/calm dogs, or outside in even the smallest of gardens.
- Tug-of-war games with rope and/or soft toys can also be a good reason to go outside and play with your dog.
  - This should involve both you and your dog 'winning' (i.e. ending up with the toy) throughout the game. Your dog can learn that they do not need to take it every time, but they should be given the opportunity to get it to increase their confidence.
  - Be careful with puppies – this is a fun game, but teething puppies have a higher risk of tooth fractures and bleeding gums than adults.
- For Fetch, Hide & Seek, and Tug-of-war, it is important that you have taught your dog to 'Leave It' or 'Give' the toy when asked.
  - This can be done by swapping the toy for another toy or food item until they understand the request, and should never be done by forcefully removing the item.

### Scent Games:

Your dog has a much greater sense of smell than we do as humans. Studies have shown that dogs can detect odours from fingerprints left on a pane of glass 6 weeks prior<sup>(3)</sup>. Asking dogs to use their sense of smell to gain a reward (e.g. finding tasty food) can really work their brain!

- Try sitting in front of your dog with tasty treats and an upside-down plastic cup.
  - Sit a treat in front of the cup between you and your dog, then move the cup over the top of it so the cup hides the treat.
  - Ask your dog to 'Find it'/'Get it' and wait for them to knock the cup over with their nose or paw to find the treat. Add in some verbal praise, 'good boy/girl!', and repeat the exercise.
    - If your dog already uses its nose or paw on cue, you can help them out by giving them this cue directed at the cup (i.e. asking them to paw the cup).
  - When your dog is proficient at knocking over the cup, add in more cups and continue to practise until you can hide the treat under a different cup without your dog seeing (e.g. whilst they are in a different room or if you move the cups around after hiding the treat under it).
    - This will ensure your dog is using its sense of smell, not sight, to find the treat!
- Try leaving a scent trail for your dog to find the item you used.
  - This could be a food-stuffed KONG toy, a pigs ear (or other digestible long-lasting chew), a favourite toy or treat. Ask your dog to smell the item, then run the item along the floor (without your dog seeing) to its hiding place before asking your dog to 'Get It'/'Find It'.
  - Always start trails short so your dog understands what to do, especially when using new items.

### Puzzle Toys:

These are toys designed to teach your dog to problem solve by working out how they retrieve a treat from an object (see Nina Ottosson)<sup>(4)</sup>. This can be in the form of a purchased toy, such as the Nina Ottosson range where they have to slide or remove part of the toy to uncover the treat. Alternatively, there are many toys you can make at home, including:

- A cardboard box full of scrunched up paper or knotted rags can be great to scatter dry treats/kibble into for your dog to find.
- They may also really enjoy tearing this apart so be prepared to clean up the mess!
- Treats in the cardboard centres of toilet rolls or paper towel rolls, in cardboard egg trays, in plastic milk or soft drink bottles (lid off), with or without holes cut in them, all make great DIY puzzle toys.
- Towels or rags folded, rolled, or knotted with treats inside can also make great puzzle toys.
- **NOTE:** this style of enrichment is not suitable if your dog ingests non-food objects as life-threatening obstruction can result.

### TIPS

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- ✓ To avoid your dog gaining weight while increasing treats but decreasing exercise:
  - Use some of your dog's daily food ration in their games.
  - Reduce their overall ration when adding in treats.
  - Alternate movement-related games with stationary games.
  - Try to keep treats and non-dog food items to <10% of your dog's overall diet.
  - Speak to your veterinarian for advice specific for your dog and its situation.

- ✓ A 'Finish' cue should be used after each game/exercise so your dog understands the exercise won't continue and hence will not keep performing (or hassling you) in the attempt to receive a reward.
  - Say 'Finish', 'All Done', or whatever verbal cue suits you and your dog whilst opening both your hands and showing your dog that they are empty.
  - When this cue has been used, you should NOT continue with any teaching (particularly if it starts to hassle you) as this will confuse your dog.
  - Avoid patting your dog or being overly enthusiastic, even if they did really well, as you want to ensure their arousal levels remain low so they can go off and settle.
- ✓ Always start any new game or puzzle as easy as possible to reduce frustration and to increase understanding of the game concept.
- ✓ Visit the Blog at [www.animalbehaviourcoaching.com.au](http://www.animalbehaviourcoaching.com.au) for accompanying videos

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