

Brain boosting activities for dogs



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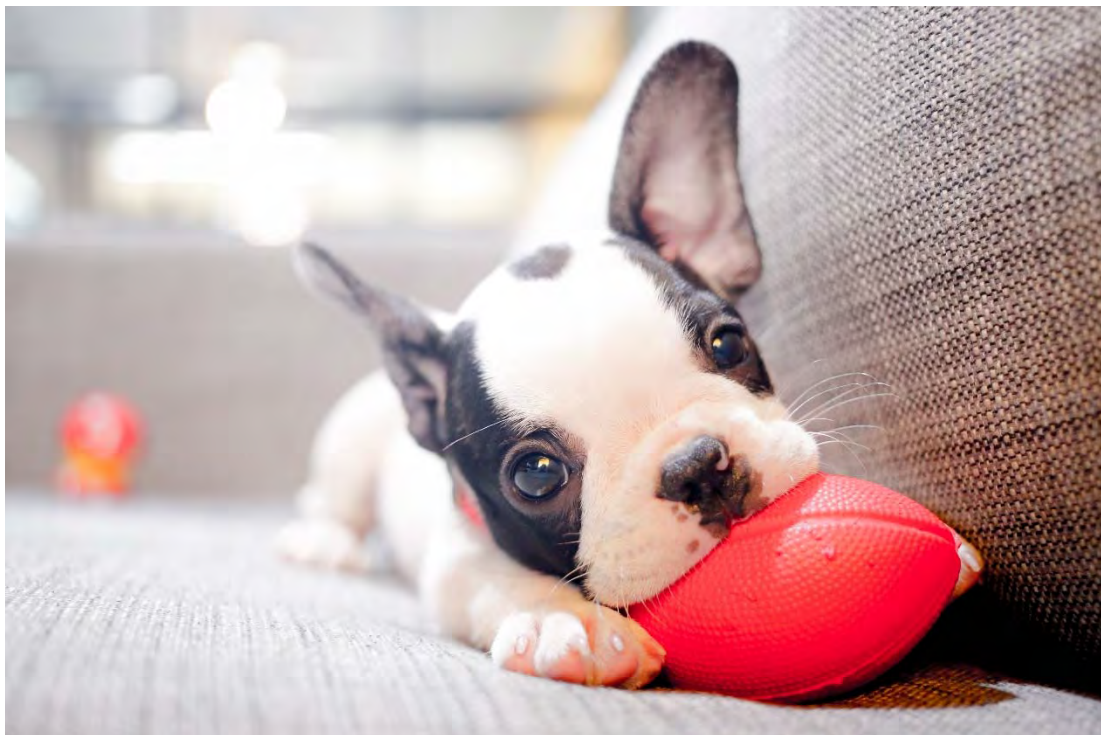
Use it or lose it

Just like us, our dogs need to exercise their brain as well as their body. Not using the brain enough can affect our dogs' cognitive functions and problem-solving skills.

This is why physical exercise on its own is not enough. You, as a responsible dog owner, also need to provide mental stimulation for your dog.

Most physical exercise also includes mental stimulation in the form of new smells and sights. However, additional mental stimulation is recommended to boost your dog's cognitive function and slow down the neurological (brain) signs of aging.

Playing, learning new tricks, socializing, solving puzzles, exploring new territories are all excellent ways to boost your dog's brain activities.



It is important to start early on. Puppies are like babies. Their brain develops very fast during their first few months of life. The more mental stimulation they get, during those first crucial months, the better. Research has shown that using mentally stimulating toys for puppies reduces their risk of developing Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS) later in life.

It is however never too late to start exercising your dog's brain. You can indeed 'teach an old dog new tricks'. It just takes longer. But it can still be as fun and rewarding for you and your dog. Even dogs suffering from CDS can benefit from learning new tasks (has been shown to improve their learning ability and memory).

The five recommended brain boosting activities include physical exercise, physical training, mental training, playing games and using mentally stimulating toys.

Each section contains examples of things you can do with your dog to improve and support his cognitive functions. It of course depends on your dog's character, breed and age which activities are most suitable. Many activities can easily be adjusted to suit most dogs, while others may be more suitable for certain breeds or physical stamina.

And these tips can hopefully inspire you to find / create your own favorite brain boosting activities which suit you and your dog. The key is always to keep the activities fun... for both you and your dog.

1. Exercise keeps the body & mind in shape

As all dog owners should know, exercise is vital for every dog's physical health and wellbeing. What not all appreciate is how important a role exercise plays in their dog's mental health and wellbeing.



All exercise contains some level of mental stimulation for your dog. Our dogs explore the world largely through their noses and every outing offers them a wide range of smells and sights which are mentally stimulating for them.



You can, however, enhance your dog's mental stimulation by keeping the physical exercise varied and interesting. Don't always go and do the same things. When taking your dog out for a walk, vary the route. Explore new territories. Try new exercise methods, like jogging or cycling with your dog. Combine your exercise with playing games. Go for a swim.

Be creative, be fun

Try to exercise with other dog owners once in a while as it provides your dog with additional mental stimulation (we all know how fun... and mentally draining socializing can be).

These exercises combine physical and mental stimulation and at least a few of them should be suitable for you and your dog. Try to vary them as much as possible:

- Walking on lead (urban)
- Running off lead (rural or secure parks)
- Hiking (long nature walks)
- Jogging (together)
- Cycling (you on the bike, your dog running next to you)
- Swimming (water, rivers, pools)
- Fitness exercises (yes, can be done with the [right guidance](#))
- Dancing, a.k.a. heelwork to music (yes, [dogs can dance](#))
- Other (actually dogs can do almost anything, they can [sled](#), [skateboard](#), [surf](#)... the sky is the limit)

Outdoor games are fun and mentally stimulating and can easily be combined with exercise. Try to break up your walks sometimes with some playtime:

- Fetch (throw a ball or a toy)
- Catch (frisbee, ball or toy)
- Football (yes, it can be done, and some [dogs love it](#))
- Hide & seek (you hide, the dog seeks)
- Find It (you hide something, your dog finds it)
- Agility exercises (jumping over suitable obstacles, walking on planks)

Then there are various outdoor and indoor sports where you can train with your dog...

2. Train with your dog

Doing sport with your dog is an excellent bonding experience which both of you are likely to enjoy. What's more, sport includes regular training and learning rules, and both are good for the grey cells.

Dogs of any age can successfully participate in a dog sport as long as their age, breed type and stamina level are taken into account.

Like people, some dogs are more competitive than others are. But almost all dogs enjoy training with their owner.



Most dog sports can be enjoyed at any level, whether you are a beginner, competing with others or 'just not that good at it' even with lots of practice.

The key is to find a sport which you both enjoy and fits both your ambitions. Don't try to compete in any sport with a dog that is not enjoying it. Or a dog that does not have what it takes physically or mentally to compete.

These are some examples of sports which combine physical and mental stimulation for both the dog and the owner:

- Dog agility (dog and owner team up to go through an obstacle course)
- Flyball (relay race that involves teams of four dogs competing)
- Sporting detection (locate a hidden target scent within an area)
- Canicross (running off-road with your dog)
- Bikejoring (riding a bike with dogs pulling you)
- Dog scootering (riding kick scooter with dogs pulling you)
- Skijoring (having dogs pull you while wearing cross-country skis)
- Dog sledding (sled pulled by one or more sled dogs)
- Canine freestyle (choreographed musical performance by a dog / handler team)
- Disc dog (distance / accuracy catching and freestyle routines)
- Dock jumping (a.k.a. dock diving)
- Herding trials (for dogs that love to herd... anything)
- Lure coursing (fast-paced chase sport for those that love to chase)
- Rally obedience (course made up of signs describing specific obedience exercises to perform)

3. Keep on learning

Research has shown that dogs that participate in adult training classes are less likely to develop CDS. Training courses are great to teach your dog acceptable behavior or new skills, as well as an excellent opportunity to socialize with other dogs (and dog owners).

There are all kinds of dog training courses available, from puppy socialization classes to various levels of obedience training. As well as courses to teach your dog new skills, like agility training.

All mental training is great brain boosting activity for dogs.



4. Games which are more than just fun

Games are an excellent way to exercise the brain and dogs of all ages love playing games. The key is to find a game which suits and interests both you and your dog. The more fun you both have playing, the better.

We have already looked at outdoor games which can be combined with exercise, games like Fetch and Hide & Seek.

There are also many indoor games you can play to mentally stimulate your dog. Many indoor games are variations of outdoor Hide & Seek, Fetch and Find It. As always, use your imagination to adjust these, or invent new games to stimulate your dog's brain.

Always make sure the games are fun and that they end on a positive note.

You may want to have a handful of small treats to hand in the beginning while teaching your dog the rules of the game. A small treat at the end of the game, or each session, may be sufficient when your dog has learned the ropes.

We use the command '**game over**' at the end of each game session. We find it to be one of the most useful commands we have taught our dogs.

Find it (scent games)

You can play different variations of this game. Allow your dog to sniff a toy and lock him in one room while you go and hide the toy somewhere in the house. Then let your dog search for it. You can help by encouraging him (excited tone) when he gets close to the toy.

You can also hide a number of small treats in one room or around the house and encourage your dog to search (sniff) for them. This is also an excellent game to play outdoors.



Hide & Seek

Is quite similar to 'find it' except there have to be two humans playing. One hides and the other lets the dog loose so he can go looking for you. Reward him when he finds you and now let him search for your partner.

Counting

Teach your dog to count by holding some small treats in your closed hands. The trick is to have a different amount of treats in each hand, say two in one hand and five in the other.

Let your dog sit down in front of you and open your palms and say 'few' or some other command you like. If he picks the hand with more treats, quickly close it and start again. If he picks the hand with fewer treats, give them to him with lots of praise thrown in.



Change hands and alter the number of treats to make it more challenging for him. The closer the number of treats, say three and four, the more challenging it will be.

Getting 'hot'

Think of something you want your dog to do. It could be touching a chair with his nose or sitting next to it. When your dog moves in the right direction say 'Hot' (excited voice of course) and even throw him a small treat. Then wait and when your dog moves again in the right direction encourage / reward him. Repeat until he has achieved what you wanted him to do. Then make huge fuss and reward him generously.

Just make sure to keep it simple in the beginning. This is more difficult than it sounds.

If you want to understand how difficult it is to do something like this try this with a partner. Ask your partner to think of something for you to do and only communicate with you with the word 'Hot' when you move in the right direction.

You will quickly realize how difficult (and frustrating) this exercise can be. But it can also be fun, rewarding and a good exercise for the grey cells!

As your dog gets the hang of the game, you can increase the difficulty level. You can actually teach your dog to do amazing things when using this as training technique.

Master of words

Teach your dog to retrieve something (like a toy) by using the name. Start by teaching him the name of two items, say ball and rope.

Then put both on the floor and tell him to fetch the 'ball'. If he fetches the ball, reward him and praise him generously. If he brings back the rope just repeat the exercise until he brings you the ball.



When he has succeeded a number of times with these two, add a third toy into the mix. So how many words can your dog learn? This may be [the girl](#) to beat!

Follow the cup

Think of the street performers with their amazing 'cup tricks'. Start with one cup and put a treat under it and use a command (e.g. 'cup').

Your dog is likely to smell the treat and knock the cup over. If he does, praise him and let him eat the treat.

When ready add two more cups to the game. Your dog is likely to smell the treat immediately if you just put it under one of the cups. To make this more difficult for your dog, you want him to use his eyes to find the treat. So rub the treat on the inside of each cup and then let your dog see you place the treat under one cup and tell him Cup.

Your dog gets the treat when he picks the right cup, but the game starts again if he picks the wrong cup. As your dog gets better you can try to make it more challenging by swapping cups... but not all dogs can do that (without using their nose that is).

These are just a few examples of games you can play with your dog. Not only will he have fun playing them, they also play an important role in keeping your dog mentally healthy and alert.

5. Toys which are more than just fun

Nowadays there are many toys available which are specially designed to mentally stimulate our dog's brain. Most include hiding a treat and recruiting the dog's problem-solving abilities to find the treat.

There are Kong's and puzzles which vary in levels of difficulty. There are balls which dispense treats when rolled. You can even get special activity maps with different tasks your dog has to complete to get their treat.

You can also make your own interactive toys. You can put a treat in a towel or a piece of cloth and let your dog figure out a way to unwrap it. You can fill a box with old newspaper and hide small treats in it.

Or you can make your own [treat dispenser](#) with a timber frame and empty plastic bottles. You can also fill old soft toys or tennis balls with treats.

As always, your imagination is the limit.

We hope you and your dog can enjoy many of these brain-boosting activities together. If you have any questions or if there is anything we may be able to assist you with, please [contact us directly](#) through our website, www.maxxipaws.com.

Kind regards,

Asa and Birgir Gislason

Owners of maxxipaws

maxxiSAmE is an advanced SAM-e formula for dogs which supports cognitive function and promotes liver health.

SAM-e supplementation has been shown to be safe and effective way to stall or improve mental decline in aging pets. SAM-e helps increase dopamine function in the brain, stimulates brain function and works as an antioxidant.

maxxiSAmE is powder and can be given with food, unlike coated tablets which must be given an hour before mealtimes.

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