

Mental Stimulation

Everyone knows that a tired dog is a good dog. Giving your dog plenty of physical exercise is important, but it's equally important to provide her with mental stimulation. Dogs love to use their brains and mental stimulation is a great alternative to long walks on rainy evenings or hot summer days.

Using Puzzle Toys

A great way to engage your dog's brain is by giving her puzzle toys. There are lots of puzzle toys available for purchase, like the Kong Wobbler, Nina Ottosson's Dog Tornado, Busy Buddy's Twist'n'Treat, or the Buster Cube. You can also make many similar toys yourself. For example:

- Grab an old muffin tin, put a treat in each hole and cover the treats with tennis balls. Let your dog sniff out the treats.
- Make a small cut in an old tennis ball and fill it up with treats or kibble – let your dog work to get the treats out.
- Hide treats inside of cardboard boxes or paper grocery bags and have your dog use his nose to find them.

Be sure to supervise your dog when she is playing with toys to make sure she doesn't swallow or choke on small parts.

My dog isn't interested in puzzle toys.

Dogs who have never played with puzzle toys may not understand how they work. You'll need to spend time showing your pup how to enjoy the toys.

Start by rewarding your dog for the smallest interest in the toy. Is your dog looking at the toy? Yes? Give him a treat! Is he sniffing the toy? Treat! Nudging the toy? Treat! You want to create instant gratification when the dog interacts with the toy in any way. Be patient; give your dog time to explore the toy. After she begins to show more interest, you can make it a little more challenging for her to get a treat. Eventually, your dog will only be rewarded for treats that she can get out of the toys herself.

Until she gets the hang of it, don't make the puzzle so challenging that she gets frustrated and gives up. You want the toys to be fun and rewarding for your dog so that she will continue to play with them.

Beyond Toys

Teaching your dog new tricks is another great way to add more mental stimulation to her life. Practicing basic cues and learning new tricks can be a fantastic way to tire your dog out on a rainy afternoon. [Take a class with your dog](#) or check out some YouTube videos for inspiration. Look for trainers that use positive reinforcement and reward-based training methods. Try [Zak George's Dog Training Revolution](#), [Dog Training by Kikopup](#), [Kyra Sundance](#) or [Training Positive](#).

Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.