

## Exercising Your Dog's Brain



Most people know that dogs need physical exercise, but their brains need a workout, too! Brain games help to burn off excess energy and are great for days when the weather makes it hard to get outside for exercise. Try some of the following brain games and toys to keep your dog's mind happy and healthy.

### Hide and Seek

Grab some treats your dog loves and have someone hold your dog while you go hide. When you're ready, call your dog and see how long it takes for him to find you. Be sure to reward him with treats and praise when he does. If you've got a helper, you can alternate calling your dog back and forth, changing your hiding place each time.

### Silly Pet Tricks

Training is a great way to engage your dog's brain, but it doesn't have to be all about obedience. Try working on tricks like high five, spin, or roll over. Remember to use lots of praise and treats to keep it fun for both you and your dog!

### Find It

Hide treats around your house and have fun watching your dog use his nose to find them. A large part of your dog's brain is devoted to his sense of smell, so any activity that involves his nose will burn off lots of energy. You may need to let your dog watch you hide the treats until he gets the hang of the game. If he gets confused, avoid pointing directly at the treats; instead, point to something near a treat to get your dog sniffing.

### Puzzle Toys\*

There are a variety of toys available that dispense treats. Some can be stuffed with sticky, wet foods like peanut butter, canned dog food, or even canned salmon. Others are good for dry or semi-moist treats. Check out your local pet store or favorite online retailer for a wide selection. If you're handy, you can also make your own puzzle toys using things like PVC pipe or plastic bottles.

### Search and Destroy

Let your dog use his hunting instincts by hiding treats inside a cardboard box or paper bag. Encourage your dog to rip the box or bag apart to get the treats. Give your dog a bigger challenge by nesting boxes or bags inside each other. Be sure to monitor your dog to make sure he's not eating pieces of paper.

### Feeding Toys\*

Your dog's meal-times are a great time to exercise his brain. Feeding toys can also slow down dogs who tend to eat too quickly. There are a variety of different toys available, from bowls with channels in them to balls with holes to allow the kibble to fall out. Experiment with a few different styles to see what your dog likes best.

## **Fetch and Tug with Rules**

If your dog likes to play fetch or tug, get more out of your games by adding a few rules that make your dog use his brain. Ask him to sit or down before you throw his ball or wait before grabbing the tug toy. To keep your dog guessing (and thinking), ask for a different behavior each time, rather than teaching a routine like sitting every time.

\*Be sure to monitor your dog with any new toy until you know how he will interact with it. Remove and discard any toy if your dog breaks off pieces that he could swallow. Avoid any toy with only one hole as this can create a vacuum that may trap your dog's tongue and cause damage.