



Oral & Mental Enrichment

Dogs need more than physical exercise to feel calm and content. They also need ways to use their brains, mouths, and natural instincts — to chew, lick, sniff, and solve problems. When these needs are met, dogs are less likely to develop behavior issues like over-arousal, barking, or destructive chewing.

Mental, oral, and environmental enrichment give your dog healthy outlets for their energy and help build the ability to relax afterward.

Puppies need *short, frequent, easy* enrichment opportunities to prevent frustration and overtiredness. Adult dogs usually benefit from *fewer but longer* and more challenging activities that keep their minds busy and bodies satisfied.

Below are ways to meet these needs at every stage.

Chewing

Why it matters: Chewing releases calming endorphins and helps satisfy natural foraging and stress-relief instincts.

Puppies:

- Offer 2-3 chew sessions daily, about **10-15 minutes each**.
- Use softer, puppy-safe options (e.g., supervised frozen washcloths, frozen Kongs, softer rubber chews).
- Chewing helps with teething discomfort and prevents destructive habits.

Adults:

- 1-2 chew sessions daily, **15-30 minutes each**.

- Use tougher chews like bully sticks, antlers, nylon chews, or raw bones (always supervised).
 - Rotate chew types and textures to maintain interest.
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Licking

Why it matters: Licking lowers stress hormones and helps transition dogs from activity to calm.

Puppies:

- 1-2 short sessions daily, **5-10 minutes each**.
- Use lick mats or slow feeders filled with thin layers of different ingredients such as pumpkin, plain yogurt, meat drippings, broth, and soaked kibble. Try them semi-frozen once your puppy has some experience with them.
- Great tool for crate time or settling after play.

Adults:

- 1-2 sessions daily, **10-20 minutes each**.
 - Use thicker spreads and frozen fillers (Toppl, Kong, or lick mat) for more duration.
 - Helps decompress after work, training, or active play.
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Food Puzzles & Brain Games

Why it matters: Problem-solving burns mental energy and teaches patience and focus.

Puppies:

- Start with very easy puzzles — muffin tin game, snuffle mat, or scatter feeding.
- Keep sessions short (**5-10 minutes**) to prevent frustration.
- Celebrate small successes to build confidence.

Adults:

- Introduce progressively harder puzzles, treat-dispensing toys, or simple scent work.
- Work up to **15-25 minutes** of focused engagement.
- Rotate puzzles to keep them novel and motivating.

Scent Work & "Find It" Games

Why it matters: Sniffing activates the brain's problem-solving center and helps dogs decompress naturally.

Puppies:

- Hide treats in easy-to-find spots around one room or yard.
- Give a visual cue to the game, e.g., hang up a towel, then say "go find it", and an ending cue once your puppy has found all the treats, like "all done." Pick up any uneaten ones.
- Keep sessions short (**just a few minutes**) and use high-value food to build motivation.

Adults:

- Same instructions as for puppies, but increase difficulty by hiding food in boxes, under cups, or around the yard.
- **5-15 minutes** of sniffing can be as tiring as a long walk.

Environmental Enrichment

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Puppies:

- Go on short, positive sniff walks (**5-10 minutes** once or twice daily) to safely explore new scents and textures.
- Offer supervised exploration of different indoor surfaces (**a few minutes at a time**, 2-3 times a week).
- Provide small changes in environment — new safe toys, boxes to climb in, or towels to shred under supervision (**5-15 minutes** daily).

Adults:

- Regular decompression walks where your dog can explore and sniff freely (**20-40 minutes**, several times per week).
- Add digging or shredding outlets — a dig box filled with sand, dirt, or towels can safely meet digging drives (**10-15 minutes**, 2-3 times per week).
- Use training games 3-5 times a week — short shaping sessions or “find it” games to engage their brain (**5-10 minutes** per session).
- Rotate toys and enrichment objects weekly to keep the environment stimulating.

Tips for Success

- Rotate activities daily to keep things interesting.
- Match chew textures and puzzle difficulty to your dog's age and temperament.
- Always supervise new chews or enrichment items until you know they're safe.
- Use enrichment after play or walks to help your dog transition into relaxation.
- Mental, oral, and environmental enrichment are not just “extras” — they're part of teaching your dog how to live calmly and happily in the human world.