

Don't let boredom ruin your puppy's brain



Your new puppy likely won't need to fight for food in the wild. That means you'll need some fun, *err*, enrichment at home to keep your canine cutie happy, healthy and out of trouble (from boredom).

You've taken the first important step to giving your puppy a happy, healthy life by seeing your veterinarian, but medical and preventive care aren't the only things a new dog needs to thrive. The good news is, veterinary professionals are an excellent resource for ways to keep your puppy physically and mentally healthy.

Enrichment is fun!

Dog ancestors hunted and foraged. Of course, your puppy is dramatically different in many ways from canine ancestors, because domestic dogs have evolved along with humans, but his puppy brain still needs challenges. We call these challenges "enrichment."

Zoo veterinarians have known for a while now that their animals were much healthier if their environments offered enrichment. You can

see polar bears floating with frozen fish or tigers rolling enormous balls. Our dogs, like these animals in captivity, are born to evade predators and find food, but they have their needs met by us in our homes, so we have to give them other interesting things to focus on.

Some fun ways to create interest are toys and games. Even if it's as simple as hiding treats under blankets or going for a walk outside, anything that makes your pup move and think is good for her. You can hide treats in an empty paper towel roll with the ends twisted (just be prepared to clean up a little mess).

Food helps!

Some of the most fun enrichment toys for you to buy will dispense food rewards as puppies figure them out. They are novel and interesting and can help slow down your

puppy's eating habits too. There are high-tech toys that launch balls for puppies to chase. There are puzzles that puppies must decipher for a food reward. Activity mats are designed to entertain puppies too, with pockets to explore. Some of the mats have thick threads that dogs have to sniff and search through to find their reward. The more senses your dog engages for each activity, the better!

You can harness your pup's natural curiosity to help her learn and develop normally. Don't forget, anything that helps keeps your puppy entertained and busy—and not trying to figure out what your shoes taste like. Ask your veterinary team what their favorite enrichment items are or be creative to find ways for your puppy to seek you, find you and get active with you at home. It doesn't matter what you do, as long as you do it together.