

# 8 Signs Your Pet Is Bored Silly

Many owners just think their pets like to snooze, but truth be told, they may be extremely bored, and boredom isn't a healthy emotional state for pets. Dogs and cats aren't designed to be sedentary for many hours each day, and that can lead to negative behaviors.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Pet dogs and cats tend to lie around quite a bit, yawning and napping, but often it's not because they're tired or content, it's because they're just plain bored
- Boredom in pets tends to show itself in the form of undesirable behaviors such as chewing, digging and attention-seeking
- Dogs need lots of physical exercise to avoid boredom, along with mental stimulation and playtime
- Bored cats respond well to environmental enrichment and interactive toys that bring out their hunting instincts
- Hunting for their meals is a great boredom-buster for both dogs and cats; you can use food puzzles and also hide bowls of food around the house

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Many pet parents assume, when they see their dog or cat lounging, yawning and napping on and off, that he's simply relaxed and content. The truth is, he may be extremely bored. It's also true that boredom isn't a healthy emotional state for pets.

"Boredom is not the trivial annoyance it is sometimes dismissed as," writes Charlotte C. Burns of the Royal Veterinary College in an essay published in the journal *Animal Behaviour*. "Animal boredom is biologically plausible: animals avoid monotony and seek stimulation."<sup>1</sup> Since we all strive to give our pets the best life possible, it's important not to ignore their need for physical and mental stimulation.

## Signs Your Furry Family Member Is Bored Out of His Mind

Boredom is especially a problem for pets who are left alone for long periods of time. Dogs and cats aren't designed to be sedentary for many hours every day, and unlike us, they can't pick up a book, watch TV or surf the Internet to stimulate their minds. Signs your pet could be bored typically involve negative behaviors including:

- Gnawing on furniture or chewing holes in carpet
- Repeatedly knocking items off tables, counters, dressers or bookshelves
- Excessive attention-seeking behavior
- General rowdiness

- Excessive vocalization
- Playing "keep away" with your belongings
- Tail chasing (theirs) or ankle chasing (yours)
- Excavating the backyard

If your pet is engaging in one or more of these behaviors, it's a good bet she's suffering "insufficient mental stimulation," as the experts call it.

## The Best Hedge Against Boredom — Lots and Lots of Exercise

Pets who are well-exercised every day typically don't get bored. Daily walks are very important for your pet, and they can improve your fitness level as well. Other great activities to enjoy with your dog are hiking, jogging, swimming and fetching a ball or playing Frisbee.

Even during winter months there are ways to keep your dog active. There are hydrotherapy and warm water dog pools for swimming, indoor dog parks and indoor agility and tracking training. An outdoor winter sport you can include your dog in is cross-country skiing.

Most dogs have a very strong "work mentality." The problem is today's dogs are unemployed because we don't give them fun and engaging "jobs" to do. Obedience training or a **nose work** class is an excellent resource to keep your dog challenged and mentally sharp.

Most dogs prefer interactive toys that involve their humans in the game. So don't assume a pile of dog toys is all your pet needs to amuse herself. In fact, if you leave your pet with toys to entertain herself, it's best to give her one and put the rest aside. Rotate the toys, bringing them out one at a time and she'll think every day brings a new toy to play with.

## Keeping Kitty Boredom at Bay

If you're owned by a cat, it's important to realize you're dealing with a captive animal. Domesticated kitties remain closer to their wild nature than most dogs do. Of course, cats living indoors are much safer and generally healthier than cats who live part or all of their lives outside, but it's far from a natural situation for them.

There are many things you can do to enrich your kitty's environment, and one of them is to set aside time for a few short play sessions each day. Discover what type of cat toys he responds to and engage him with them. Use toys that encourage stretching, reaching, jumping and running.

This type of activity is both physically and mentally stimulating. Your cat is answering his natural drive to hunt and pounce, and getting good aerobic exercise in the bargain.

If you're lucky enough to have a safe, fully enclosed outdoor area that contains your cat and keeps other critters out, your kitty will probably really enjoy being outside in good weather. You could also consider leash training your cat to provide some additional sensory stimulation.

## Hunting for Food Is a Boredom-Buster for Both Dogs and Cats

Your dog or cat, while domesticated, has maintained much of his natural drive to engage in the same behaviors as his counterparts in the wild, including hunting for food. Because our pets don't have the freedom they would in the wild, it's up to us to give them opportunities to practice those natural instincts. A great way to do that is to have your dog or cat "hunt" for his food.

At dinnertime, try separating your dog's meal into two or more food puzzle toys (such as the West Paw Toppl Treat Toy or the Outward Hound Star Spinner) designed to encourage her to interact with the toy to get the food. This will stimulate her brain and also provide her with both physical and mental activity for the length of time it takes to manipulate all the food out of the toys.

If your pet has never been exposed to puzzle toys, you'll need to phase them in gradually (in other words, don't put the entire meal into the toys right out of the gate if she's never seen the toys before). You may have to show her how to use them by digging the food out yourself as she watches. You can also try smearing a bit of food on the outside of the toys to entice her. When she's finished, be sure to wash and rinse the toys thoroughly, especially if you feed a fresh food diet.

If you have a cat, try separating his daily portion of food into three to five small meals fed throughout the day in a variety of puzzle toys or indoor hunting feeder mice. If you work outside the home, you can give him two or three stuffed toys before you leave the house, then a couple at dinnertime and one at bedtime.

This will encourage your cat to "hunt" and eat on a schedule similar to his wild cousins, and as an added bonus, he might just sleep through the night thanks to the puzzle toy you give him at bedtime.

Another way to have your cat hunt for food is by hiding his food bowls in various locations around the house. Start with one bowl in his usual spot, and then place additional bowls in other areas where he is sure to find them. You can also do this with puzzle toys. If you have more than one pet in your home and they don't (or shouldn't) eat the same food, you'll obviously need to keep them in separate areas of the house and insure they can't get access to food that isn't meant for them.

## Remember — Pets Aren't Lifeless Possessions

Though legally we "own" our pets, it's a mistake to view them as just another possession. People with this outlook often don't understand or acknowledge their pet's need for exercise, mental and physical stimulation, playtime and meaningful interaction with human family members.

Dogs, cats and other household pets are sentient beings. Unlike your car or your couch, your pet is a conscious, living creature with feelings. And she has species-specific lifestyle requirements that include biologically appropriate nutrition, exercise, social interaction and health care.

Many of the pets with behavior problems veterinarians see in their practices show dramatic improvement when their treatment protocol consists of regular, daily sessions of aerobic exercise. Many pet owners who try this "therapy" are amazed at the difference just a little daily physical activity makes in their dog's or cat's behavior.

### Sources and References

