

This Simple Boredom Buster Stimulates Both Cats and Dogs

Does your pet destroy everything in sight — even though he knows better? He might simply be bored. Here's a simple method of counteracting these nine boredom indicators that you can adapt for both dogs and cats. And you hardly have to spend anything!

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Most pets suffer from boredom once in awhile. Signs that your pet could use more mental stimulation include destructive behavior, tail chasing, ankle chasing (typically a cat behavior), and excessive attention-seeking
- Finding ways to have your dog or cat “hunt” for his food is one solution for boredom. You can use puzzle toys to encourage your pet to work for his food; you can also hide bowls of food around your house
- Adequate exercise, interactive playtime, and your time and attention are also excellent antidotes for pet boredom
- If your kitty (or dog) 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)
- Spending time with your pet each day is also extremely important for his overall well-being. It can be about playtime, a positive reinforcement training session, brushing, a nice massage, or just some cuddle time

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Most animal companions get bored from time to time, especially 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.

Do you suspect your pet is bored? Is Miss Kitty climbing the walls ... literally? Is Buddy pacing slowly back and forth in front of you, stopping occasionally to fix you with that pleading look? More signs your pet could be bored:

- 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
- Excavating the backyard
- Ankle-chasing

If one or more of these behaviors looks familiar to you, it's possible your pet is suffering "insufficient mental stimulation," as the experts call it.

Hunting for Food Is an Antidote for Pet Boredom

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 we hold our pets captive, so to speak, 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 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. When she's finished, be sure to wash and rinse the toys thoroughly, especially if you feed your pet a raw diet.

Feline Food Hunting

Cats in the wild can spend nearly half their day hunting for food, and your own feline fuzz ball has maintained that same drive. If time permits, try separating your cat's daily portion of food into three to five small meals fed throughout the day in a variety of puzzle toys. If you work outside the home, you can give her 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 her wild cousins, and as an added bonus, she might just sleep through the night thanks to the puzzle toy you give her at bedtime.

As demonstrated in the following video, the ingenious human owned by Monkey the cat built an awe-inspiring automatic feeder so that Monkey could "hunt" for food on his own:

If your kitty (or dog) 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.

Hide-and-Seek with Food Bowls

Another way to have your cat "hunt" for food is by hiding his food bowls at 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 their paws on food that isn't meant for them.

More Cures for Boredom — Exercise, Playtime, and Companionship

Pets who are well exercised on a daily basis typically don't get bored — A tired dog is a good dog. At a minimum you'll want to take your dog on a brisk walk every day to keep him physically active and stimulate his senses.

Most cats are responsive to toys that can be dangled in front of them or dragged on the floor, inviting them to pounce. Try to interact with your cat with toys for 20 or 30 minutes a day to get her moving and mentally stimulated. Also make sure she has ample cat-friendly items around the house to climb and perch on.

Spending time with your pet each day is also extremely important for his overall well-being. It can be about playtime, a positive reinforcement training session, brushing, a nice massage, or just some cuddle time.

You may have noticed that your pet is never bored when you're spending one-on-one time with him, so that's your cue to give him more of you!

Sources and References

[VetStreet September 24, 2014](#)
