

If Your Lonely Pet Could Talk, They'd Ask You for This

You may need to leave your furry friend for hours at a time. Or you're home but crazy busy. They hate the loneliness and boredom as much as you would. Give them the mental stimulation they love with these eight low-cost but surprisingly fun tricks — some are interactive, but not all.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

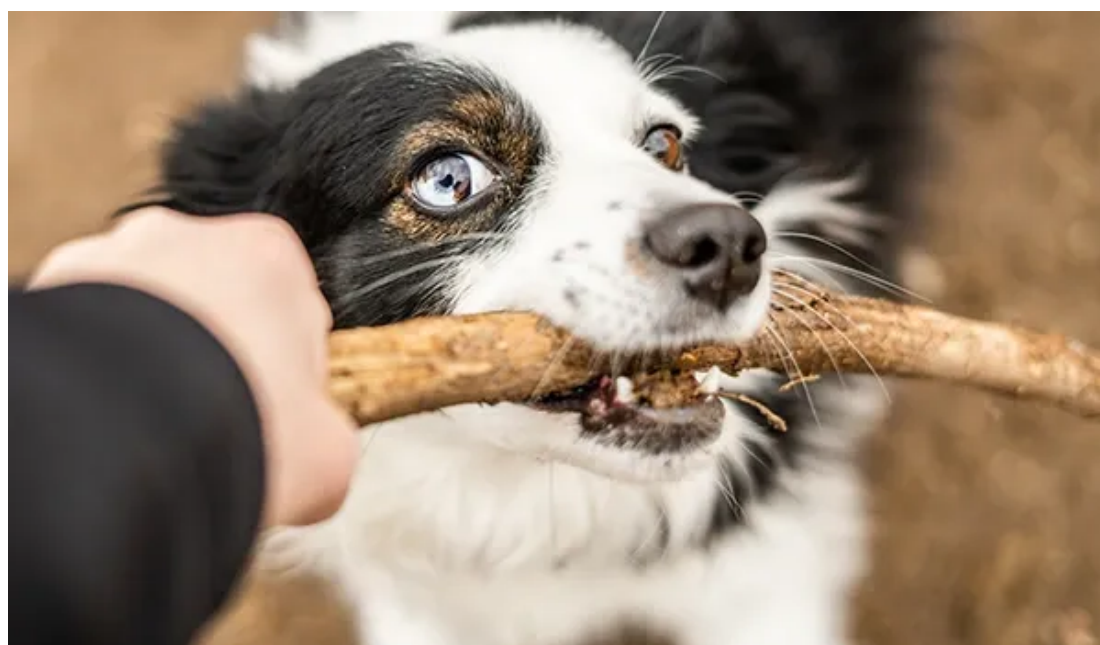
- Dogs need both exercise and mental stimulation to be optimally healthy and well-balanced
- With a little ingenuity and insight into your dog's personality, you can find toys and activities to help you interact in a fun, positive way with your pet while simultaneously keeping his mind sharp
- Interactive dog toys like tug toys require your participation, which makes them great fun and stimulation for your dog
- Toys that hold treats or food are a great way to challenge your dog's mind
- There are also many things you can do to help keep your dog occupied when she's home alone

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8 Must-Haves to Keep Your Dog Mentally Stimulated

1. **Tug toys**



Interactive dog toys like tug toys require your participation, which makes them great fun and stimulation for your dog. Tug toys don't have to cost much, either. In fact, anything with two ends or two sides will do! You can even play tug with one hand while talking on the phone or surfing the Internet with the other.

Tug games is a great way to tire your dog out, and as they say, "A tired dog is a good dog." One caveat: Playing tug-of-war with a dog who becomes over-stimulated or aggressive should be avoided.

2. **Fetch toys**



Fetch toys are also interactive, which makes them ideal for playtime with your dog. Many pups love fetching balls or catching Frisbees. Others love to chase after soft toys. And some dogs love things that bounce around unpredictably, making them more challenging to go after.

3. **Treat-release and food puzzle toys**



Toys that hold treats or food are a great way to challenge your dog's mind. Some people even feed their dog's entire meals out of Kongs or similar toys to slow them down while simultaneously engaging their brains. Treat-release toys and food puzzles are also a good idea when you need to leave your pet home alone for a few hours.

4. **Frozen treats**



Frozen treats offer your dog a novel distraction because they require her to work at them, while offering a texture and complexity that will engage her brain. Two super healthy, species-appropriate frozen treats you can make very easily at home are Bone Broth Popsicles and Frozen Banana Basil Towers.

5. **Digging box or sandbox**



If your dog is a digger, you can engage his mind and distract him with a digging box that you bury toys in for him to find. Find out how to build one and how to get your dog to use it at [**Whole Dog Journal**](#).

6. **Change up your dog walks**



Your dog needs a change of pace and scenery just like you do. That's why you should vary the purpose of your walks with her. For example, along with potty walks, which are quick, purposeful walks, take mentally stimulating walks that allow your dog to stop, explore, [**sniff and send pee-mail**](#).

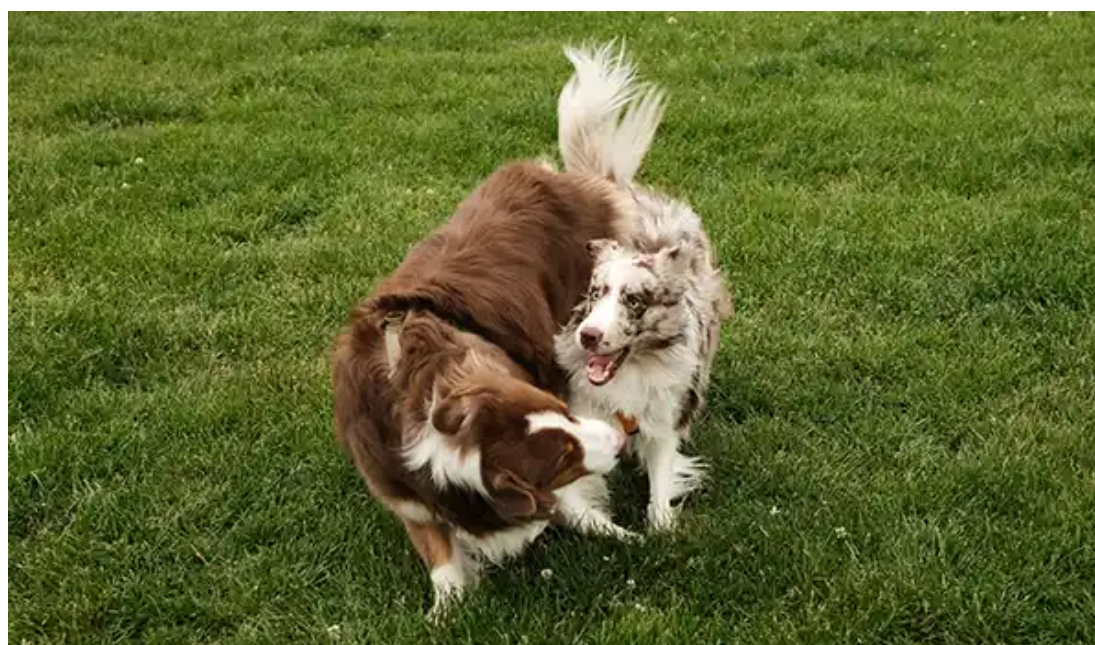
Also mix in some power walks to help her get the aerobic exercise she needs for good cardiovascular health, as well as training walks, which can be about improving leash manners, learning basic or advanced obedience commands or ongoing socialization.

7. **Teach your dog new tricks and skills**



The tricks and skills (for example, **K9 nose work**) many dogs can learn are limited only by their owners' imagination. There's nothing better than learning new things to keep your pet's mind sharp throughout his life, and training sessions also strengthen the bond you share with him.

8. **Arrange a play date**



If you have friends with dogs, arrange play dates. Put your dog and his canine friend in a safe, enclosed area and let them get to know each other. This is especially beneficial for pets who tend to be standoffish with other dogs. A doggy play date is a low-pressure social situation in which your pup can hone his social skills without being overwhelmed by too many dogs, or an overly dominant dog.

Sources and References

[PetMD \(Archived\)](#).
