

Makes Your Dog a Troublesome Thug in Very Short Order – Unless You Do This

Many dogs show embarrassing or destructive behaviors - engaging in acts of chewing, digging, jumping up on people, scratching, dumpster diving, and more. Resulting in frustration and negative health conditions. What if all she needed was this simple action on your part?

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Most dogs today don't get enough exercise, which can result in obesity and other health conditions, as well as undesirable boredom-related behaviors
- As a general guideline, dogs should get an absolute minimum of 20 minutes of sustained heart-thumping exercise three times a week; most dogs can benefit from longer sessions every day of the week
- There are countless ways to help your dog get the exercise she needs, from power walks to dock jumping to musical freestyle
- It's important to match the type of exercise you choose to what's best for your dog's body
- The benefits you'll see when your dog is well-exercised each day include a healthy weight, good physical conditioning and a calm temperament

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published April 20, 2018.

Every dog needs exercise, and most canine companions these days don't get nearly enough. Your dog's ancestors and wild cousins spend their days hunting their next meal, defending their turf, playing, mating and caring for litters of pups. Their daily lives are extremely active and social, and challenge them both physically and mentally.

Compare and contrast the life of a canine in the wild with the one in your home, and you get a sense of just how out of condition and bored silly many family dogs are today. Some of the behaviors that are common in under-exercised dogs include:¹

- Inappropriate chewing
- Rowdiness, jumping up on people
- Destructive scratching, digging
- Inappropriate predatory play
- Dumpster (trash can) diving
- Mouthiness, rough play
- Heightened reactivity, **hyperactivity**.

- Attention-getting behaviors

How Much Exercise Does My Dog Need?

It's important not to assume that a fenced-in yard provides all the exercise your dog needs. Studies show that when your dog has no other dogs around and no humans encouraging him to be active, he'll spend 80% of his time snoozing.

Dogs who have other dogs around for company spend a little less time resting — about 60%. The bottom line: like their owners, dogs need reasons to get physically active. Even the biggest, greenest backyard isn't by itself enough to motivate your furry family member to get the exercise he requires to stay in good physical condition.

The best and really the only way to make sure your dog gets enough exercise is to provide him with the companionship and motivation he needs to stay active. If your dog doesn't get regular opportunities to run, play and exercise aerobically, even if he's not **overweight he can end up with arthritis** and other debilitating conditions that affect his bones, joints, muscles and internal organs. In addition, many **canine behavior problems** are the result of a lack of physical and mental activity.

Your dog should be getting an absolute minimum of 20 minutes of sustained heart-thumping exercise three times a week. Thirty minutes is better than 20, and six or seven days a week is better than three.

Minimum exercise requirements prevent muscle atrophy, but don't necessarily build muscle mass, strengthen tendons and ligaments, hone balance and proprioception, or enhance cardiovascular fitness, which is why more is always better. If you can provide your dog daily walks as well as additional daily training sessions to meet your other exercise goals (lose weight, build muscle, improve heart function), even better!

How to Help Your Dog Get the Exercise He Needs and Deserves

It's important to keep in mind that simply strolling with your dog isn't an adequate workout. If walking is your thing, your dog needs sessions of power walking — moving at a pace of 4 to 4.5 miles an hour (about a 15-minute mile) to achieve good cardiovascular intensity and caloric burn.

Power walks can provide important health benefits not only for your dog, but also for you, including lowering your risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and joint disease. First, though, you have to reprogram your pooch if he's accustomed to sniff-piddle-dawdle walks. Don't expect to make a one-day transition from leisurely strolls to power walking. It will take several sessions for him to catch on.

Of course, you'll also be taking your dog on casual walks, so you'll need to help him learn to distinguish between the two. It could be a time of day thing — for example, you could schedule slower walks for first thing in the morning and again before bedtime, and workout walks in between. Or you could develop a verbal cue that tells your pet he's about to go on a power walk.

I also strongly encourage the use of a harness for exercising with your dog. A leash attached to his collar can quickly become a health hazard as you're cruising city streets or even country roads. Many dogs learn which walk they're going on by whether the leash gets attached to their collar (short walk) or a harness (time to get serious!).

If you aren't able to move at a power walk pace, you'll need to involve your dog in other types of cardiovascular exercise like swimming, fetch, Frisbee, agility competition, flyball, flying disc, flygility, dock jumping, herding, hunt and field trials, or musical freestyle. Dogplay is a good resource for exploring organized exercise and socialization possibilities for your dog. You might also consider a bike ride alongside your dog using a special bike leash.

It's important to match the type of exercise you choose to what's best for your dog's body (for example, brachycephalic breeds have special considerations), temperament (dog-aggressive dogs have special considerations) and age (older animals or those with permanent physical disabilities have special considerations). The type, duration and intensity of exercise you choose for your pet may need modifications over time.

Benefits of Exercise for Dogs

There are countless benefits to keeping your canine companion well-exercised, including:

- Reducing or eliminating common boredom-induced behavior problems
- Keeping her weight in an optimal range
- Maintaining her musculoskeletal system (skeleton, muscles, cartilage, tendons, ligaments, joints and other connective tissue) in excellent condition
- Normalizing and regulating her digestive system
- Building confidence and trust in a shy or fearful dog
- Improving her ability to be a calm, balanced individual ("A tired dog is a good dog")

One final thought: Some dog parents believe if they do lots of weekend activities with their pet they can make up for lack of exercise on weekdays. But the problem with this approach is that you can actually create injury to your dog by encouraging him to be a weekend warrior.

When a dog's body isn't well conditioned, sudden bursts of activity can cause injuries that lead to long-term joint damage. Consistent daily exercise is a much safer approach and has profound long-term health benefits you don't want your dog to miss.

Sources and References

[Paw Culture \(Archived\)](#).

¹ [WebMD \(Archived\)](#).
