



Exercise, fitness and play for your dog

Exercise, fitness and play should form an essential part of every dog's daily enrichment program regardless of their breed or life stage. There are many exercise options, so it doesn't have to be all about physical activity – mental activity is also essential!

If you find that your dog engages in inappropriate behaviours at home – stealing, barking, digging, destructive behaviours, or chewing – you may need to add more engaging exercise and play to your dog's day. When dogs have nothing to do, they will – just like children – find ways to amuse themselves and often, their doggy activities include chewing or digging. Employ your dog with enrichment activities and physical and mental stimulation every day to overcome these struggles.

There are many and varied ways to exercise your dog physically. The APDT handout on Activities describes organised dog club activities like agility, flyball, tracking, lure coursing, sledding, doggy dancing, earth dog, endurance, herding, gun dog and retrieving trials that you and your dog can participate in. Research your breed to discover its original role, and contact your local club to get involved.

Other exercise activities that you can engage in right outside your front door include walks, off-leash play, games, interactive toys and training.

Walking

Most dogs love to go for a walk. It's an opportunity to explore the environment with their nose, sniff the scent of other dogs that have passed by and leave their scent to communicate their presence. Walking is also a great energy release and an opportunity to bond with your dog.

Vary where you walk to keep the experience interesting for both of you. Create different routes that you can take in your neighbourhood. Also, give your dog the ability to choose which direction you both should head. Be random and avoid areas your dog may struggle with, such as a busy road or a park filled with people playing sports. Be your dog's advocate and make walking a relaxing and pleasant experience. It's not the length of the walk that is important, but the positive experience you both have.

Walking creates training opportunities. You can cue your dog to sit at each kerb and wait until you give them a cue to start walking. Using verbal or visual cues also helps your dog focus on you while out walking. Teach an interrupter, such as 'leave it' to prevent your dog from picking up items with their mouths.

If you have problems getting your dog to walk nicely on a loose lead, consult a trainer to learn this vital skill for you and your dog.

Once your dog is happy to walk politely by your side, go beyond your local neighbourhood and explore walks further afield. Enter the search term **Dog walk** [insert your state or area] into Google to discover unique places you can take your dog close to where you live.



Off-leash play

Local council by-laws state that dogs must be on leash except in designated off-leash areas. You can find out more about these areas and their location by checking your local council's website. Fully fenced dog parks are great for those breeds or individuals who may wander too far or get caught up in the joy of running when off lead. Dog parks and other off-leash areas, e.g. parks and beaches, can be great fun for your dog.

Always supervise your dog and monitor their interactions with other dogs and people. Don't let them loose and rehearse inappropriate behaviours. Ensure you have an excellent recall and a positive interrupter to help them disengage from activities that may cause incidents to occur. You are responsible for your dog in these leash-free areas. Ensure that your dog is not overstimulated, as this can cause high-arousal associations for your dog – whenever you go to the park, your dog becomes over-excited and behaves poorly. Instead, take some time to develop calmness and focus when around the other dogs.

Dogs parks and off-leash areas may not always be a suitable activity for your dog. Each dog is different, so having different ways to exercise your dog is essential.



Games and interactive toys

What can you do if the weather is not suitable outside, or your dog is under vet orders to reduce exercise? All is not lost; plenty of interactive toys and activities can stimulate your dog mentally and physically.

- Build an obstacle course in your living room or hallway
- Practice calmness and self-control games
- Hide objects around the home for your dog to find
- Teach your dog tricks and other physical skills
- Use your body as an agility set and encourage your dog to go between, under or over your legs.

Training

Participating in training classes is a great way to exercise your dog. Find an introductory manners training class or an obedience club promoting positive reward-based training methods. Obedience classes are group sessions held one day per week. The sessions, run by volunteer instructors, are drop-in classes where you and your dog will learn the requirements for competing in obedience trials. While competing isn't required, you and your dog will learn skills such as sit, drop, stand, stay, heel and come (recall). To find an obedience class near you, go to your state's dog association website.

Professional dog trainers may also run dog training classes in your area. Go to www.apdt.com.au or www.deltainstitute.edu.au to find a trainer for your dog.

Manners classes are usually 6 to 8-week courses, run one day per week. Here you will learn the obedience class skills and other behaviours to have a well-mannered dog in your home. You will also learn about healthcare, diet, exercise, grooming, and typical behaviour problems and solutions. There is often a basic and advanced manners class.

A combination of training will benefit your dog and help you build a stronger relationship with your dog. Begin with a manners course to get you off to the right start with positive training, then go to the drop-in style obedience classes to continue working with and socialising your dog.



Australian Dog Associations

For further information about obedience clubs follow the link for your state's dog association. While many clubs hold competitions, dogs can also participate at many clubs on a casual basis or just for fun and fitness. As well as being a great activity for your dog, many dog clubs offer great social outlets for guardians too!

Australian Capital Territory

www.dogsact.org.au

New South Wales

www.dogsnsw.org.au

Northern Territory

www.dogsnt.com.au

Queensland

www.dogsqueensland.org.au

South Australia

www.dogssa.com.au

Tasmania

www.tasdogs.com

Victoria

www.dogsvictoria.org.au

Western Australia

www.dogswest.com

