

WOODVALE PARK

VETERINARY HOSPITAL



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DOGS WITH ENERGY TO BURN

There is little doubt that no matter how much we love our dogs, the friendship can get somewhat strained if we come home to destruction or soiling inside. It's even worse if our relationship with our neighbours and the council is threatened because our pooch has been barking all day or repeatedly escapes despite our best efforts to keep him confined.

There are numerous causes for these types of behavioural problems but one aspect of a treatment programme that can help to reduce these unwanted activities involves providing more stimulation and unpredictability in the dog's routine. While some owners react by confining the dog or tying it up so that its annoying habits are not so widespread, this will tend to add to the potential stress and/or boredom the dog feels and will make matters worse in the long run. A far better strategy is to implement as many of the following recommendations as possible and in doing so identify those activities which benefit your dog most.

These are marked individual differences in the requirements for stimulation and activity that a dog requires – some are happy to lounge (or lap) lizards while others like to be on the go all day. Don't be concerned if you only have a small back yard – the area available is far less important than what takes place there.

Ideas for Owners Short on Time

Some activities that our dogs enjoy can be provided without the need for a lot of additional time on our part. Most dogs enjoy eating but will eat their meal very quickly. We can make this activity more challenging by providing at least some of their ration stuffed inside a "Kong" (a sturdy, hollow rubber toy) or within a training treat ball (which the dog must roll around to allow pieces of food to drop out). This can extend eating time from a few minutes to a half an hour or more. Providing raw hide bones to chew on is also worthwhile. Giving several to start with will help to reduce the chance of the dog burying them. Be sure to monitor your pets if you have more than one, to ensure bones and toys don't trigger aggression between them. Don't leave all the toys out all the time or they will become "humdrum". Offer a different toy every day and rotate the toys over a period of a week or so.

Some dogs become frustrated because they can smell and hear activities going on outside their yard but are unable to see out. Providing a couple of escape proof "windows" in solid fences can help. If your dog enjoys digging then providing a sand pit for this purpose can save the rest of your garden, while meeting the dog's needs. Allow your dog to watch you digging some of his favourite toys and some chews or bones into some loose soil and reward him for digging this area. Most dogs soon work out that it is more fun to dig in this area than disturb the rest of the garden which is much less interesting. Initially you will still need to bury quite a few items but the need for this will diminish over time. A bird bath, a secure aviary or caged bird, if you enjoy these, can help provide some added entertainment for the dog. These things take time to set up initially but provide a permanent source of enrichment for the dog in the long term.

Even a short game of throw and retrieve can allow a substantial amount of aerobic activity in a relatively confined space. Ensure you control when the game starts by having your dog sit quietly first and control finishes by putting the toy away while your dog is still interested in playing. Different items can be chased. These can include balls – hit with a tennis racquet if you have a large area and athletic dog, squeaky toys, kongs or dog Frisbees which are specifically designed to be long lasting and easy for dogs to pick up. Some dogs prefer to play soccer with a basketball with a little encouragement from you.

Quality Time With Your Dog

Stimulating your dog's mind is just as important as giving him physical activity. Some basic obedience work, either at home or in a class situation, can assist you in having better control of your dog as well as giving him a mental work out. Ask your veterinary clinic for advice on classes in your area or contact the R.S.P.C.A in W.A. for your closest Canine Good Citizen* qualified dog trainer. You may consider reading David Weston's book "Dog Training – The Gentle Modern Method" as a guide for training at home. Dog trainers use different methods to be sure to find one that uses a gentle positive reinforcement and reward approach. You may need to shop around for the trainer you like. Before selecting a training group, go to a class without your dog to

see if you feel comfortable with the instructor and their methods. Dog's who love to run and play will often benefit from agility work.

Making time to ensure your dog has regular walks can be difficult – but even 20 minutes a day can make a difference. Obviously, longer or more frequent sessions are even better. Your local council can advise you about where your dog is permitted to run off lead. Consider the use of a head halter such as a “Halti” if you have problems with your dog pulling or being unruly on the lead.

Swimming is another pastime that many dogs enjoy and is particularly good for any individuals with arthritis. There are canine swimming pools in some areas or you may have access to a beach or lake where dogs are permitted.

Some owners consider getting another dog as a source of activity for their current dog. Unfortunately, there is a risk that your problems may double by this approach. A better solution, if possible, is to have another dog visit or arrange to meet it on your outings together. Not all dogs will welcome the company of others but if they can be monitored closely during the initial stages then many will go on to become a great source of entertainment for one another.

The Benefits

It takes considerable effort to put the above suggestion into practice. Some dog's behaviour will deteriorate for the first few days then settle down to a much more acceptable level. Enriching your dog's environment will help to keep him content by giving him the opportunity to direct his energies in a positive manner. This allows you to enjoy a much happier relationship with your pet and makes the time and effort all worthwhile.