



ARMAN ZHENIKEYEV/SHUTTERSTOCK

CABIN FEVER CURES

Got cabin fever? Your dog probably does, too, especially if the lack of light or Old Man Winter has curtailed your routine walks or runs. Yet don't let the change of season put a damper on your pup's activity level. "Research suggests that mental and physical activity reduces a dog's anxiety and improves a dog's ability to handle stressful situations, which is especially important when dealing with behavioral issues," says Matt Tuzzo, a Certified Professional Dog Trainer-Knowledge Assessed, and the owner and head trainer at Jersey Shore Dogs in Old Bridge, N.J. Plus, put yourself in your dog's paws: Would you really be happy doing nothing all day?

Ideally, the average dog should get six to eight hours of activity a day, says Tuzzo, admitting that this gets tough in the winter. But don't think you have to log a marathon every day with your dog. "This includes everything from training and

other forms of mental stimulation to physical activity and casual walks, even belly rubs and general play-time," he says.

Indoor physical activities, for instance, might include tossing a ball in the basement or playing tug. "Although many people believe this causes aggression, there's no research to prove this," Tuzzo says. "Besides, your dog can burn some physical energy, and you can work in positive training by asking dogs to turn off the energy when you ask them to."

Also find time for mental stimulation, which is equally important as physical activity. "Mental activity stimulates your dog's brain, which could be enough for some dogs to maintain sanity during long winter days," Tuzzo says.

Reward-based training is a great way to engage the canine brain. "Teaching your dog a new trick is like a human doing a complex math problem," he says. Just 10 to 20 minutes of training can leave a dog mentally exhausted.

Another strategy? Give your dog food puzzles and games, which require a little work to eat treats or meals. You can even leave these out while you're away; just make sure the puzzle or game is safe for your dog when unsupervised. Tuzzo likes using these after a training session. "You get your dog's brain engaged and then ease her into something that's less people-oriented, giving you time to get on with your day," he says.

— K.A.

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