

# How Much Exercise Does My Dog Need?

By Ana Melara, CPDT-KA



Photo of Ana Melara by Travis Otto

I know my dog needs exercise, but how much? And how do I provide this with the winter weather right around the corner? My dog is making me crazy!

High-energy dogs need rigorous exercise and a structured training routine. We cannot reasonably expect a high-energy Jack Russell, a young pitbull, or an adolescent Border collie to live happily in a sedentary lifestyle. Dogs as a whole are social creatures. They need power walks as well as social dog-to-dog times and times to sniff and play. This may also be supplemented by daily wrestle-mania sessions with the other dogs in the household. Many dogs benefit significantly from this type of lifestyle. I sure know mine do.

All dogs benefit from regular physical and mental stimulation. Depending on your dog's individual needs, you may have to provide more than just a leisurely stroll around the block. We all have busy schedules, so we often don't give the dogs in our lives the appropriate amount of mental and physical exercise for their needs. With no way to release this unused energy and without having been taught how to cope with it, problematic behaviors often develop.

Exercise is essential to keeping your dog's physical and emotional health at an optimum level. Lack of physical exercise can lead to obesity, poor muscle tone, heart problems, bone and joint disorders and will often result in emotional problems, boredom barking, destructive behavior and anxiety.

There are a variety of solutions to address this pent up energy. Here are some great suggestions. Prepare your dogs' meals and stuff them into Kong toys or Busy Buddy toys. There are many interactive toys out there for you to choose. Instead of feeding your dogs out of their food bowl, try playing training games that require them to problem solve. Here is an example: I take a Kong<sup>®</sup> toy stuffed with my dog's dinner and I lay it on a scrap piece of fabric (about the size of a hand towel), I sprinkle some of her dry food over the toy and the fabric. I then take another piece of fabric and cover that. All the while, my dog has been getting praised and rewarded for practicing her down-stay. With these examples you can exhaust your adolescent or busy dog's mind. You can work and rework your obedience skills and raise the distraction levels, all to earn their food for that meal.

These mental activities provide enrichment with minimal physical activity. These are great ways to entertain your dog on rainy days or if your dog is injured or recovering from a surgery.

We get a lot of calls inquiring about help on behavior problems. Our top three are:

1. Poor leash manners including lunging at other dogs and people on walks.
2. Bad door greeting manners, including jumping up on people when they come over.
3. All different kinds of aggression including resource guarding, controlling, nipping and fence fighting.

The first thing I do is ask about the household structure, boundaries and privileges. When I see that a dog is behaving poorly, I know there are underlying causes.

It is important to take into account the age of the dog, breed or possible mixes and exercise level required by the dog. I even look at the food that is being fed.

If the dog is a young cattle dog puppy and full of energy and has full run of either the whole house or a large portion of the home without much structured exercise or good brain stimulation, then we know that there is going to be a need for structure.

Some very useful ways to get started are blocking off sections of the house with properly-sized baby gates, providing a good amount of mental and/or physical exercise and feeding the right food. If you have a dog that is a pretty strong jumper, getting a baby gate that your dog can't jump over is very important. Enriching, mental and physical exercise is, in my opinion, not negotiable. I can see it in my own dogs when I have been lax with stimulation. A perfect example of this in my newest edition, my Staffordshire bull terrier, Tatonka. He



Photo by Alena Ozerova

has been with me for about seven months now. He is very easily stimulated by squirrels and other dogs running. He also has a very hard time not being the center of attention. When I work my other dogs, he stresses, paces, whines and pushes forward. So to work with a dog with

short triggers, I teach families how to break down each item into smaller goals with shorter endpoints in order to reward more frequently. With a higher rate of reinforcement, your results will drastically improve.

Stay away from foods that are loaded with junky preservatives and inferior ingredients. I stay away from BHT, BHA, Ethoquin and propylene glycol. Regular walks can also be very beneficial to your relationship building. It takes some creativity.

Ana Melara, a certified professional dog trainer, lives in Lakewood with her husband Travis, their daughter Rebeca and their four dogs, Gracie, Argos, Meg and Tatonka. For more information on private training and group classes, please visit [www.TrainingWithGrace.com](http://www.TrainingWithGrace.com) or email her at [Ana@TrainingWithGrace.com](mailto:Ana@TrainingWithGrace.com).

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