

Work+Play from a Down: Alleviate the Boredom of Restricted Activity

Restricted activity is both boring and frustrating. Dogs on restricted activity need games to play and they need attention. They are used to being active, and they really don't want to lie still, especially since they may not understand why they aren't allowed to have fun. They are likely to feel as though they are being punished, and, left to their own devices, are likely to vent their frustration and boredom by trying to break free and play, by barking, whining, and generally having temper tantrums. There is a lot that you can do to make restricted activity easier on your dog, and easier on yourself.

Keep Your Dog Close. Remember that dogs are pack animals. Dogs view prolonged isolation as punishment. If you are keeping your dog in a crate, in an x-pen, or on a tether to keep him from injuring himself, keep him in the room where you are the most. Even when you aren't actively interacting with your dog, he can still watch what you are doing, and he'll feel better knowing where you are and what you are doing.

Keep Your Dog Mentally Busy. People are frequently surprised at how quickly mental exercise can make their dogs tired. A minute (or less) of training can go a long way towards tiring out your dog. If you have your dog with you while you are watching TV, take the time during a commercial to teach your dog something. Remember, you want to minimize frustration, so reward early. This should be fun for you and your dog. (Information about how to train these behaviors can be found on our website: www.workplaydogs.com)

All of the following behaviors can be taught to your dog, without your dog ever leaving a down:

Doggie Zen (in order to get what you want, you must ignore it)

Attention

Leave It

Left and Right

Retrieve (YES, this is a behavior you can teach to a dog who isn't supposed to move)

Touch What I Touch

Press a button (or turn a tap light on and off)

Tug calmly



Fergus practices the hold portion of the retrieve without leaving his down

Ring a Bell

Hide Your Eyes

101 Things to Do with A Box From A Down

Names of Objects

The Shell Game

Funny Faces

Speak (and variations such as counting)

Let Your Dog Work for His Meals. You could give your dog his kibble in a bowl, and for a few moments he'd have fun eating it, and then he'd be bored again. A better idea is to stuff his kibble into a toy so that he can have the fun of chewing, gnawing, and working to get it out, and he could be kept busy for much longer. Chewing on things, and solving the "how to get the food out" problem gives your dog an outlet for his frustrations. Don't waste your dog's kibble by putting it into a bowl. Stuff it into a Kong or a bone.

Stuffed Kongs A Kong is a beehive shaped rubber toy with a hollow center. Stuff something tasty into the Kong, and give the Kong to your crated dog. This way the Kong cannot roll around too much and your dog won't be tempted to chase after it.



Kong

If your dog has never had a Kong before, the first time you give your dog a Kong, make sure that it's full of extra tasty items so that your dog is very motivated to figure out how this toy works. As your dog gets an understanding of how to get the food out of the Kong, you can start to use a small amount of an extra special treat in the middle, and fill the rest of the Kong with kibble. Also, try stuffing Kongs and freezing them. On hot days, dogs like cold treats, and frozen Kongs are a great challenge for those dogs who have lots of Kong experience.



Kong viewed from bottom

Kongs can be purchased at most pet supply stores and they can be cleaned in the dishwasher.

For more information about Kongs and what to stuff in them, visit <http://www.kongcompany.com>

Stuffed Bones These are a toy that dogs love to work on, and again, you can stuff the bone full of kibble and a small bit of peanut butter or cheese and your dog will be kept busy for quite awhile.



You can buy sterilized bones at most pet supply stores, or, after your dog has cleaned out a raw beef marrow bone, you can stuff that.

Raw Beef Bones No kibble needed for these. Raw beef bones can be purchased at the grocery store and they can provide hours of entertainment for your dog. There are all sorts of things to chew, and gnaw, and to pull off. If your dog has not had a raw beef bone before, supervise your dog, and limit access to the bone. Sometimes the pure decadence of a raw beef bone can lead to loose stools.

Chew Toys In addition to toys that you can stuff, there are several other chews that you can give your dog to keep him busy. These toys don't have the benefit of being a puzzle, but dogs enjoy them, the toys exercise their jaws and clean their teeth, and these are an easy way to keep your dog busy. Ask your vet or trainer to recommend something your dog will love.

Restricted activity isn't easy, but by taking a few extra minutes and using a few simple tools, you can turn frustration into opportunity. Remember, the key to getting your dog up and moving again is closely following your veterinarian's instructions.

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