

## 8 Indoor Exercise Ideas to Get Your Pup Active

While dogs need time outdoors to sniff, explore and romp, an occasional indoor workout can add variety to their daily activities.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dogs need a minimum of 20 minutes a day of vigorous exercise that will keep their heart rate up, and more if they're overweight
- While dogs need time outdoors to sniff, explore and romp, indoor workouts can add variety to their daily activities
- Tug of war and fetch can both be modified for heart-pumping indoor play
- Indoor obstacles courses, using pillows, chairs, broom handles and cardboard box tunnels, provide both mental and physical challenges
- Hide and seek, stair aerobics and scavenger hunts can also get your pup moving even when you don't want to venture outdoors

Cold weather during the dog days of winter may leave you — and your pup — tempted to stay indoors, but regular exercise is still important. Fortunately, when you're cooped up inside, whether it's too frigid or too stormy to venture outdoors, there are still ways to get active.

Dogs need a minimum of 20 minutes a day of vigorous exercise that will keep their heart rate up, and more if they're overweight. Ideally, I recommend you strive for an hour of rigorous exercise a day with your dog if you're looking to maximize their health span and lifespan. Here are several ways to achieve this goal, even if you're stuck inside on a dreary day.

### 8 Indoor Exercises to Get Your Dog Moving

While dogs need time outdoors to sniff, explore and romp, an occasional indoor workout can add variety to their daily activities. And just like you benefit from a variety of workouts — strength training, endurance, stretching, high-intensity and balance and core work, for example — your dog also gets different benefits from different types of exercise, such as those that follow.

1. **Tug of war** — Grab a tug toy and gear up for a game that's both physically and mentally challenging for dogs. If your dog gets overly rowdy or aggressive, stop the game, but otherwise, let your dog do most of the work pulling the toy toward him — and be sure to let him win sometimes.

Playing tug can boost your dog's confidence and help him learn to work as a team, while also using self-

control and getting a heart-pumping workout. You can also practice obedience skills, including “drop it,” while playing this mind-body game.

2. **Indoor fetch** — Grab a soft ball or your dog’s favorite stuffy and toss it down a hallway or other long stretch indoors. Indoor fetch can be physically challenging even if it’s using shorter distances than might be covered outdoors. For an extra challenge, particularly if your dog is young and fit, toss toys up the stairs for your pup to retrieve.<sup>1</sup>
3. **Obstacle course** — An indoor obstacle course can be just the ticket to turn a boring day into an extraordinary one, at least in your dog’s eyes. Along with providing physical challenges, obstacles courses can also offer mental stimulation. You might try stacking a couple of thick pillows for your dog to walk over followed by a series of broom handles to navigate and a hula hoop to jump through.

Other options include a chair to jump on or run under or a cardboard box with both ends open that acts like a tunnel. You can also attach a pole to two stools for your dog to leap over or scurry under. To keep things fun, offer plenty of praise or a couple of **healthy treats** when your dog conquers a new obstacle. If you aren’t interested in DIY, you can also find indoor agility equipment that’s ready-made for fun.

4. **Indoor digging box** — A fun option for dogs that love to dig is to create a digging box that you place in your family room.<sup>2</sup> Fill it with blankets, crunched up newspapers and other safe materials, then bury toys for your dog to discover.
5. **Hide and seek** — Most dogs love **scent tracking**. Hide and seek hones in on this natural instinct, and can be a mentally stimulating way to get your dog up and moving. To play this classic game with your dog, you’ll do the hiding and your pup will do the seeking. Start out with some easy hiding spots and stash a few treats there. Tell your dog to “sit and stay,” then go hide.

After a few moments, yell for your dog to “come” — and try to stay quiet while they find you, offering a few clues if necessary. When your dog finds you, reward him with a treat and praise. Gradually move to more challenging hiding places and continue to reward your pup with lots of praise when he finds you.

6. **Indoor scavenger hunt** — A variation on traditional hide and seek, rather than searching for you, hiding items around your home for your dog to seek out. This may include favorite toys or treats, but make sure it’s something your dog will be interested in sniffing out. For best results, train your dog how to find objects on command first. Then, have him sniff the object and hide it out of his sight before giving the command to find it.<sup>3</sup>
7. **Flirt pole** — Also known as a flirt stick, a flirt pole is an exercise tool that appeals to your **dog’s prey drive**, enticing him to chase a moving lure. It consists of a pole with a rope tied to one end, with a toy attached to the rope’s end.

Simply move the toy around so your dog can have fun trying to catch it. In addition to giving your dog some exercise indoors, a flirt pole can also help your dog practice basic commands like sit, down, look, wait, take it, leave it and drop it.

8. **Stair aerobics** — Stairs provide a natural uphill challenge to get your dog’s heart rate up. Go to the bottom of the stairs and put your dog in a sit-stay. Then, toss a toy up to the landing and give your dog the nod to go after it, ascending the steps as fast as her legs will carry her. Allow her to come back down the stairs at a slower pace to reduce the risk of injury.

Ten or so repetitions of this will give most dogs a great workout. I use stair exercise in conjunction with **Dr.**

**Sophia Yin's** awesome Treat&Train system all winter at my house. Be sure to use stair aerobics only if your dog is fully grown so her joints have fully developed.

By alternating through these activities, you'll be able to keep your dog's attention and increase her physical fitness even on days when you're stuck indoors. If all else fails and you need a spot to let your dog run and roam, you can likely find an indoor **dog park** in your area — some even offer indoor swimming for dogs, too.

## Sources and References

<sup>1,3</sup> [PetMD October 30, 2023](#)

<sup>2</sup> [PetMD May 18, 2023](#)

---