

Why Does Your Dog Sleep so Much?

If your dog is like the average family dog in the US, he spends only about 20% of his time being active. What's happening the rest of the time? You may be surprised to learn that his quality of sleep isn't exactly like yours.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Cats aren't the only pets who sleep a lot. The average family dog spends about 50% of his time snoozing
- Factors that influence how much sleep your dog needs include his age and size, breed and activity level, life changes and overall health
- Whereas humans spend about 25% of their sleep time in restorative REM sleep, dogs only spend 10% in REM, which may explain why they need so much sleep

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If you think it's only your cat who's a world-class snoozer, have a look at your dog right now. What's he doing? If he's not eating or playing, chances are he, too, is catching some zzz's. And if he's like most dogs, he's doing it 12 to 14 hours a day, according to the American Kennel Club (AKC).¹

The average family dog in the U.S. spends about half his time napping, another 30% lounging around but awake and the remaining 20% being active. There are several factors that determine how much sleep your dog needs, including:

- Age and size
- Breed and activity level
- Life changes
- Health status

Your Dog's Age and Size Influence His Need for Sleep

Just as it is with humans, young dogs and seniors need more sleep than healthy adolescent and adult dogs. Puppies spend their awake-time exploring, playing and growing, so they need as much as 18 to 20 hours of sleep each day to recharge their batteries.²

Older dogs typically need more sleep because like human seniors and the elderly, day-to-day living presents more challenges and they tire more easily. Big dogs tend to need more sleep than the little guys, probably because large and giant breeds age more quickly and have shorter lifespans.

A Dog's Breed and Activity Level Also Affect Sleep Patterns

Another factor in how much sleep your dog needs depends on what she was bred to do. Dogs bred to work, for example, the Border Collie, tend to sleep less because they have evolved to do jobs that require attention and dedication.

At the other end of the snooze spectrum are dogs with no work history. Breeds that have never had a job to do other than sit on their human's lap are more likely to excel in the "hours slept per day" category.

And, of course, dogs who are kept busy and on the move by active owners naturally sleep less than dogs belonging to more sedentary people or families who aren't home during the day.

Even a Small Change in Your Dog's Daily Routine Can Increase His Need for Sleep

Dogs are creatures of habit and do best with a daily routine they can count on. When something in your dog's day-to-day life, environment or "pack" dynamic changes, it can have an effect. This might include the addition of a new family member (two- or four-legged), or the loss of one.

It definitely includes a move to a new home, taking a trip or being boarded and even a change in a family member's work or school schedule.

One of the **signs your dog is dealing with change-related stress** is a temporary need to sleep more than usual to rebalance his equilibrium and regain his normal energy level.

An Ill or Injured Dog Tends to Sleep More Than a Healthy Dog

Generally speaking, **a dog who is ill or injured will sleep more** than a healthy and fully mobile dog. That's why it's important to observe your pet's normal sleep patterns so that you can act quickly if she's suddenly sleeping much more (or less) than normal.

If you notice something off about your dog's need for sleep, I recommend checking in with your veterinarian.

How Human and Canine Sleep Differs

Unlike us humans who do best when we stick to a consistent sleep-wake schedule, your canine companion is an adaptable sleeper. She's designed by nature to jump to attention in a heartbeat when necessary, for example, when it's time to bark maniacally at the doorbell.

After ferociously defending her home, she can be back to sawing logs almost immediately. She'll also sleep when she's bored or home alone waiting for her people to return. As soon as she hears a key in the door, she's up, fully alert, tail wagging.

Another difference between human and canine snooze patterns is that we spend up to 25% of our sleep time in REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, whereas dogs spend only 10% of sleep in REM. It could that be dogs need to sleep more often to catch enough REM sleep, which is restorative.³

The next time your dog lays down for nap, it might be interesting to watch what happens. She'll first enter a slow wave of sleep in which her breathing rate slows, her blood pressure drops and her heart rate decreases. About 10 minutes in, she'll enter the REM phase of sleep, and you may notice her eyes moving under closed lids. This is also when you might see her acting out a dream by either softly whimpering or chuffing, or by appearing to run while sound asleep!

Sources and References

[Mother Nature Network June 27, 2022](#)

¹ [AKC.org May 2, 2024](#)

^{2, 3} [Sleep Doctor, February 28, 2024](#)
