

Super Active Dogs

Does your dog always run through the house with a toy or personal items whenever you are home, always on the go? Do you find it impossible to get your dog tired no matter how much fetch, walks, or other play they have? If so, your dog is a super active dog. This can be either a delight or a frustration. Personally, I find dogs like this a reason for me to get off the couch, play, and get outside. For some, the dog's energy level is hard to keep up with. Take heart; if you are getting frustrated, there is hope for both you and your dog.



There are different activity needs depending on the age, breed, temperament, and health of the dog. Often people do not realize the aerobic exercise needs of the breed of their dog. In my experience, this is where most frustration lies. People expect a puppy to be full of energy and need playtime, training, and regular walks and exercise. After the puppy reaches 2 years old, many owners expect them to slow down. Some dogs never seem to lose that puppy energy. Most dogs were bred to work but they have lost their job in our modern lifestyle. So these dogs have pent-up energy that they have to expend.

An example of breed-related activity is the Jack Russell Terrier. These dogs were bred to chase down rats in a barn and kill them at the rate of 15 rats per minute. These little dogs are ready to run quickly at anything that moves, zoning right in to grab-shake-kill. Eddie, the little dog on the TV show "Frazier," was a Jack Russell Terrier. Cute as a button, small in size, a calm, faithful companion to the father. To have a Jack Russell this calm in a home means that dog receives lots of ball play, walks, and eating from food puzzles. How much actual time that takes will depend on that particular dog. In my experience, at least 45 minutes of ball play, 2 - 3 30 minute walks a day, and at least 1 meal only out of a food puzzle keeps a Jack Russell calm. In other words, keep them busy. I see many 15-year-old terriers still active while other breed dogs are slowing down. Think of the needs of your dog - a Sheppard needs to be out scouting the area, sniffing different places. They LOVE hikes in the state park. A retriever needs to go out for long walks and have retrieving games.

Meeting the exercise needs of a dog is the best way to manage living with a super active dog. How can you know if you are meeting that need? I tell my clients all dogs need a minimum of 1 minute of walking per pound of body weight per day. For younger or more active dogs, this may be 2 - 3 times that amount. Give this dog 2 - 3 walks a day, meeting the time requirement. Active play that has the dog panting and choosing to rest is the aerobic level dogs need. Typically this is 20 minutes of sustained play. Exercise can be difficult in the winter, but think of creative ways to play in the home, a ball diamond, or hikes in the state park. Local trainers and rescue groups are holding barn hunts, dog hikes, and other fun owner-dog games centered on the natural behaviors of the dog. If you start supplying this level of activity for your dog, you will find many frustrating behaviors like jumping up on you, pulling things off the counter, and over-barking reduce.

If you cannot walk much, or have the stamina yourself to get your dog this exercise, what to do? Dog walkers can help, running club members may want running buddies, or someone who no longer has a dog may enjoy some dog companionship. In a fenced-in area, you can throw a succession of balls one right after the other to keep the dog retrieving. A digging pit made of a sandbox with toys or treats hidden in it is great for the terriers.

A fenced-in backyard is not enough exercise area for a dog over about 10 lbs. Most dogs eliminate in their yard, but do not exercise. The outing of walks and runs stimulates their mind and increases the

calming brain chemicals. Many of the behavior cases I see in my consulting practice have increased walking as an essential part of the treatment plan. If your dog is not good at walking on the leash, there are positive trainers who can help you.

I know what it is like to live with a super active dog. My own dog, Bella, is a very active Lab/Shepherd/cattle dog mix. If she does not get three 20-minute walks a day, her 2 meals out of a variety of food puzzles, and play, she is a naughty dog. She needs to sniff, play, and interact with her world. She is a great watchdog and can be frustrating when the weather is bad, or everyone is too busy to keep up with her needs. We step it up when she acts up - we understand she needs her walks like she needs air to breathe. For me, I see her as my motivator to not work too hard, get outside and enjoy the world. I hope you see your super active dog in this way too.

Understanding our pets is an important way to give them what they need.

- written by Dr. Sally J. Foote