

# How to keep your dog mentally stimulated while they're recovering from surgery

While surgery in itself can be daunting, the recovery process can be even more so. It can be a struggle to keep your dog's activity restricted post-surgery, but it is vital to their recovery.

Mental stimulation for dogs is important, and can become even more rewarding during the post-operative period, as it will help with your dog's boredom and let them burn some energy.

Mental stimulation is just as rewarding as physical exercise. For example, 15 minutes of mental brain training is roughly equivalent to a one-hour walk.

**To help, we've suggested a few ways to keep your dog's brain busy after surgery below.**



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# Puzzle Feeders

Like humans, dogs need to keep mentally stimulated to stay happy and healthy. Puzzle feeders and similar toys make mealtimes a brain game for your pet, as they challenge them to think and solve problems in order to win their food. They are a great way to decrease boredom and increase problem-solving skills.



Puzzle feeders can be purchased from most pet shops or online suppliers, and there are many different varieties with varying levels of difficulty. High-value treats are best to use for these games to help your dog solve them. Once they get the hang of the game, you can move onto lower value treats or their dried kibble. Alternatively, you can create your own by using a cardboard box with screwed up paper and treats inside.



## Slow feeders

Slow feeders have many benefits for dogs. They provide mental stimulation, which is perfect for highly energetic or bored dogs, and can improve digestion, lessen the risk of choking or vomiting and reduce any stress, anxiety and flatulence. They are particularly good for deep-chested dogs, as they help reduce the amount of air they are swallowing whilst eating.



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# Snuffle balls and snuffle mats

Snuffle mats are great for putting your dog's nose to work. Treats such as sprinkle-dried kibble or chopped up vegetables are embedded, requiring your dog to root for and locate them. This encourages dogs to forage for food and keeps them entertained. You could even make your own by rolling up or twisting up a towel containing their favourite dried food.



## Lickimat

Lickimats have many benefits, especially for those who need to be kept calm following surgery. The action of licking releases endorphins, which has a calming effect on dogs.

Lickimats can act as a positive distraction, redirect your dog's focus and help satisfy mental stimulation, which can reduce boredom. They can also be used to encourage dogs to relax and remain still, as well as making mealtimes more fun. You can freeze them to make them last longer.

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# Ball puzzle feeder

Also known as interactive toys, ball puzzle feeders can have many benefits for dogs. Puzzle balls can help engage your dog's problem-solving skills, keep them busy and prevent any destructive behaviours. They can also reduce anxiety and stress levels.



## Long lasting chews

Long lasting chews are a great way to keep your dog amused whilst they are on a restricted exercise plan. As long as they are not recovering from jaw, oral or dental surgery, hard-wearing chews and toys are great ways to keep your dog busy for a while. Make sure your dog isn't eating too many treats, and limit the amount given so that your dog doesn't gain weight whilst recovering.



## Kongs

Stuffed Kongs are a great way to keep your dog busy. They are made from durable rubber, help keep jaws strong and teeth clean, and provide dogs with an appropriate way to fulfil chewing instincts. They can be filled with your dog's favourite food and treats, and stuffed Kongs can be frozen to make it even harder for your dog to reach their reward. This can keep their mind active and focused for long periods of time.

Teaching dogs acceptable chewing behaviours with a Kong also helps prevent destructive chewing.

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# There are also many great brain games you can do at home with basic things you may already have.

## The cup game

The cup game is an easy and affordable way to provide enrichment for your dog. You can slowly build things up while playing this game with your dog, gradually increasing the difficulty.

**Equipment needed:** three cups and treats.

- To introduce your dog to the concept of the game, begin with one cup. Allow them to watch you place a treat under the cup.
- Give your dog a cue to touch the cup with their paw or nose, or to knock over the cup to allow them to eat the treat.
- Once your dog starts to understand the concept, move up to three cups. Rub the treat on your hand and on the outside of the cups to spread the scent around and increase the difficulty, providing further enrichment.





## The muffin tin game



The muffin tin game is another simple DIY game.

**Equipment needed:** muffin tin, balls and treats

- Place treats in a few of the holes and cover all the holes with tennis balls.
- The aim of the game is for your dog to not only locate the treat, but also to learn how to remove the ball properly in order to get the treat.
- This game may sound simple, but it can provide hours of stimulation for your dog!



## Change of scenery, car rides or environment change

A simple environmental change can make a big difference to your dog. If they're able to safely ride in the car, take them for a quick trip out in the car, or sit outside if they can't go in a car. This can help provide some mental stimulation.

If they are restricted to staying inside the house or crate, contemplate on changing the room they are in.

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