

During the post-operative phase, it is extremely important for your dog to not engage in overly strenuous physical activity; however, it is beneficial for your dog to still engage in mental enrichment activities. Oftentimes, mental enrichment activities can tire your dog out more quickly than physical activity.

The following are ideas you can use during the post-operative phase (and beyond). Closely monitor your dog during any interaction with a new toy or object. If you see that your dog is interacting with it in a potentially unsafe manner, please discontinue use.

### **Safety Disclaimer:**

Knowing your dog is crucial to ensuring their safety. When providing a toy or appropriate dog chew, be sure to watch your dog and know how they interact with that object. Please make sure to choose toys that are appropriate for your dog's size and weight. If you are not certain, opt for the bigger size to prevent accidentally swallowing the toy or having the toy get stuck on your dog's lower jaw. Be cautious in choosing items like a Bully Stick chew. If your dog is one that typically chews the stick very slowly to the very last bite, this would be considered safe for them to have. If your dog typically bites off large pieces, this may become a choking hazard. You may want to consider another type of enrichment object. We do not recommend the use of rawhide bones due to the risk of intestinal obstruction.

## “Nosey” Games

Most dogs love sniffing around, especially for treats or discovering new scents on walks. This behavior is a crucial part of their natural lifestyle and should be encouraged. Allowing a dog to use their nose for exploration uses more energy in just 20 minutes than an hour of physical exercise. When your dog is recovering and on limited physical activity, you can harness their natural sniffing ability to help reduce the stress associated with these restrictions.

### **Sniffari**

Your dog is on restricted walks during the post-operative phase, however, that pertains to structured movement (i.e. walking on a leash). While on leash, simply allow your dog to sniff the ground or objects. Most dogs will be methodical and slow about what they choose to sniff – allow them to guide the sniffari as long as the terrain is safe for them to maneuver during this phase of healing.

### **Shell Game**

You'll need cups and treats. If you have the time, this is also a great way to feed your dog's dinner. Start with 1 cup and 1 treat placed underneath. Have your dog sniff it and then raise it so they realize there is a treat under it. Once they understand (usually after 3-5 times) increase to two and then three cups. Hide one treat under one of the cups and let your dog sniff for it. Your dog will get better at this game the more you play it. You can even add more cups if your dog really enjoys this type of thinking and sniffing.

## Boredom Busters

Dogs are creatures that naturally enjoy working for their own food. Foraging is the act of searching and working to obtain food. Use this to your advantage when coming up with enrichment activities during the healing process and beyond. If you feed kibble, you can even spice up mealtime with one of the below activities rather than feeding out of their normal bowl. Be cautious if your dog has food aggression. These types of activities may encourage that type of behavior.

### Simple Food Puzzle

Scatter your dog's kibble in your yard and let them find it. This can be done for mealtime.

### Weeble Toys

Perfect for dogs who love to nudge things around! These toys have a heavy base, a light top, and a hole for kibble. Your dog will have a blast smacking it to release the treats.

### Treat Dispensing Balls

For dogs that enjoy pushing things around with their nose, treat balls come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and difficulty levels. The idea is for them to push it around and have kibble fall out of the holes.

### Licki Mats

These are great for many dogs. You can smear canned dog food, yogurt, dog-safe peanut butter, cheese, or pureed fruits and veggies. Freezing them extends lick time.

### Floor Feeding

If you don't mind a little mess on your floor, while supervised, create a lick trail of peanut butter on your kitchen floor for your dog to lick (ensure there is no Xylitol or Birch Sugar in your PB).

### Puzzle/Slow Feeder Bowls

Using puzzle or slow feeder bowls can turn mealtime into a rewarding experience, promoting both physical and mental health for your dog.

### Snuffle Mats

A snuffle mat can be bought or made with various complexity options. Start with a simple style if your dog is unfamiliar, then increase complexity as they get comfortable. YouTube has instructional videos for making one. This is great for indoor use, especially in bad weather or without a yard. Initially, use one snuffle mat until your dog understands the "game." As they learn, switch to a new mat or place several around the house to encourage sniffing and foraging for dinner. Vary the mats and locations to prevent boredom, sometimes using kibble and other times leaving them empty.

### Towel Rolls

**\*\*Not recommended for dogs that destroy towels or blankets\*\***  
Spread out a towel on the floor and toss your dog's favorite treats or kibble on it. Gently ruffle the towel so that some of the treats are covered and allow your dog to snuffle around and find them. If your dog is up for a more involved challenge, you can roll the treats up into the towel and allow your dog to unroll it in search for their beloved snacks. As they become more experienced, you can increase the difficulty by using different folding or rolling techniques and incorporating items like blankets or quilts.

## Destructible Forage Options

The following involves using recyclable items you may have on hand to make DIY foraging toys that can be discarded when done. These DIY toys let you assess your dog's play and foraging style before buying any expensive toys. Always start with an easy setup so your dog understands the game before moving to more challenging configurations.

### Paper Towel Rolls

Fill paper towel rolls with food, then pinch, fold, or twist the ends in various ways. You can punch holes in the tube or stuff it with newspaper. Hide these filled rolls around the house for added fun.

### Plastic Bottles

Clean and dry the plastic bottle of your choice. Fill bottle with food. In various ways increase the challenge by keeping lid on, punch or burn several holes in it. Tightly screw on lid to prevent choking hazard.

### Cereal Boxes

Cut off one surface of the box. For a very easy toy, choose the front or back of the box. For a harder one, opt for one side or the other. For the biggest challenge, cut the top or bottom. Put food in your uniquely shaped cardboard bowl! You can make things more challenging by increasing layers of boxes, opening or closing the lid, and adding food to all or some of the layers.

## Non-Destructible Forage Options

### Cupcake Pan

Put food in cupcake pan – 12 smaller, individual bowls instead of one big bowl! Mix kibble with food items that can be frozen like canned food, pumpkin, and Greek yogurt. To add an additional challenge put the cupcake pan in cardboard box for them to retrieve treats.

### Cookie Sheet

Put food on a cookie sheet! Mix kibble with food items that can be frozen like canned food, pumpkin, and Greek yogurt. To add an additional challenge put the cookie sheet in a cardboard box for them to retrieve treats.

### Peanut Butter Jar

**\*\*Ensure your dog is big enough to not get their head or muzzle (nose) stuck in the jar\*\***

Put kibble in PB jar with or without lid. With lid on can, punch several holes in jar to make a DIY food ball. As they roll jar around kibble will come out. To add additional challenges fill jar with wadded up paper towels or toilet paper rolls.

## Non-Destructible Forage Options

### Puzzle Toys

Puzzle toys come in many varieties for dogs, but please think of your dog's play style when purchasing a puzzle toy or feeder. You may choose one that you think is cute, but your dog may think it's boring or too difficult. Some dogs like to sniff or push things with their noses, some dogs like to use their paws or mouths to open things, some dogs like to pick things up to shake, and some dogs like to chew and destroy things.

### Kong Toys

The idea here is for your dog to have something to lick and focus on. These are perfect during the early post-operative stage. Fill with your dog's favorite kibble, canned food, fruits, veggies. You can freeze to increase the difficulty. When freezing, place a straw down through the middle of the Kong so that both holes have an opening to prevent any suction while your dog is licking it. Remove the straw before giving to your dog. Visit the Kong website for recipe ideas.

### PVC Pipe Food Bomb

Drill holes in PVC pipe, the more holes the easier the puzzle. Make sure the holes are big enough to allow your dog's kibble to come through the holes. Add your dog's kibble to the PVC pipe and put a PVC cap on one or both ends. To add challenges lessen the amount of drilled holes, stuff with other objects that block the food from getting out of the holes easily. Be sure to use items that won't come out of the holes.

This is also a great time to work on some new tricks or improve your dog's manners, as well as tire them out with minimal activity. Some safe examples include:

- Sit and Stay
- Sit to Down
- Sit to Stand
- Shake Hands – left and right
- High Five
- Play Dead
- Touch a Target

All these enrichment suggestions revolve around food. Given their surgery, it's crucial to avoid overfeeding your dog while implementing these methods. Using their mealtime kibble, vegetables and fruit can help keep their calorie intake down. If you require assistance with your dog's nutritional requirements, please don't hesitate to reach out.