



Dr. Russell H. Patterson, DACVS  
Dr. Allen L. Johnson, DACVS  
Dr. Russell L. Bennett, DACVS  
Dr. Alexander Z. Aguila, DACVS

## BOREDOM BUSTERS

Now that surgery is over and it's time to head home, you and your dog face the challenges of a rehabilitation period. This time is important, and following your doctor's guidelines will help ensure that your pet's recovery process is successful.

We highly recommend maintaining a comfortable and stimulating environment for your dog during this time. However, many pets begin to "feel like themselves" and have high energy levels far before they should be allowed to exercise this energy. Compliance with strict confinement and activity restriction is difficult, but is essential for proper healing.

Here are a few hints to make life for you and your pet more comfortable and bearable during recovery.

**Always keep your pet clean and dry, with comfortable padding in cage or kennel.**

Change bedding often.

**Provide a pleasant background noise while the house is empty, such as a radio or TV left on at low volume.**

If you must leave your pet for an extended time, arrange for a neighbor or other responsible person to take the dog for a leash walk and to potty during the day. Make sure the dog walker understands all exercise restrictions.

**Keep your pet in proximity to family activity in your home as much as possible.**

Pets like to be part of the family, and interactions provide entertainment. If there are other animals in the household, it may be necessary to keep them away from a recovering patient. Other pets may cause over-stimulation or frustration to a patient who needs to stay calm. If separating pets into different areas of the house, try to balance the time each pet spends with family.

**Tie downs are encouraged to get your pet out of a crate or small area.**

This is a way to have your dog nearby while you are cooking dinner or watching TV, while still keeping the pet under control. (We strongly discourage use of tie-downs when your dog is home alone, due to safety concerns.)

Tie-downs can be as simple as a leash fixed under a solid leg of furniture. The leash must be short enough to discourage jumping onto the furniture. If there is no heavy furniture nearby, you could tie the handle end of the leash in a heavy knot and trap it under the far side of a door jam, while the door is shut. Or you can loop the leash handle over the door knob on the far side of a door and then close the door to hold it in place. Do not use this on any door that leads outside.

Prevent any free run of the house. Even when your dog is on a long down-stay or sleeping on its bed in an open room, it is important to keep the dog leashed. Most dogs are all too happy to jump up and run to the door in an instant when the doorbell rings. You should also take precautions to prevent animal from escaping outside when a door is opened. Even fenced yards provide too much freedom and your pet must stay leashed during the initial recovery period.

*Always prevent jumping onto and off furniture by keeping tie downs short enough to prevent this.* We strongly suggest no bed or couch access, as this could result in your pet jumping down from an area you may have placed them on. Although your dog may happily remain on your bed most nights, there is a chance that he or she may jump down for some reason while you are sleeping, possibly injuring the surgical site. If you are used to sleeping with your pet, please make your bed on the floor and join your animal there during this recovery time.

Spending time relaxing outdoors on a nice day provides wonderful visual stimulation for your dog, as long as seeing the birds and squirrels won't cause your dog to become over-excited. It is best if your dog remains under your observation at all times when outside. If your dog is small, you can place an X-pen or even a playpen outside in the yard or on the deck to confine the dog. For larger dogs, you can tie the dog out on a **short** leash. *Never tie your dog on a deck in such a way that the dog could slip or jump off and result in choking.*

**Provide fun and interesting items for your pet.**

Kong toys (or other hard rubber hollow toys) can be stuffed with a variety of treats that can keep your dog occupied for a few hours. Choose the most durable and largest Kong for your dog. The dog should not be able to close its mouth around it, but rather lick and nibble at the toy's contents only. X-Large is best for most labs and larger breeds. Ask for assistance at the pet store if you have questions, or give us a call. If you have not given your pet this type of toy before, we advise you to keep the dog under close observation with the toy prior to being left unattended. Even the toughest toys sometimes do not withstand a heavy chewer, and possible ingestion of a toy or its parts can be dangerous to your pet.

Remember that some of these treats can add extra calories to your dog's diet, so use sparingly. Here are some stuffing possibilities:

**Peanut** butter, cream cheese, canned dog food or meat baby food, grated cheese: Smear a small amount over the inside of the toy. You can soak a piece of bread in water and stuff it in after adding the treat to make the dog work a little harder for it. Also, freezing the Kong after stuffing it will make the treat last longer.

**Small** to medium-sized hard dog cookies wedged into the toy.

**Chicken** broth frozen inside the toy: Plug the hole in the small end with a small, softened piece of cheese, then fill with broth and stand upside down in your freezer until frozen through. Best for use when your pet is confined outside or on a non-carpeted surface!

**Marrow** bones are also acceptable to keep your dog busy, as long as the dog doesn't have the tendency to break the bones or chew hard enough to damage teeth. Your butcher can provide you with long bones, and licking the marrow out will occupy your dog for hours. After the marrow is gone, peanut butter can be smeared lightly over the inside surface of the bone. It is best to give your dog bones only when under your supervision, since ingested bone fragments could be hazardous to your dog.

**Pets are still allowed to use their brains even if they cannot use their recovering limbs.**

Take this time to brush up on basic obedience such as sit, stay, down, heel and other actions if your pet is able to do so easily. This work can begin following the pet's first post-operative check (usually about two weeks into recovery). This is also a great time to begin clicker-training work. Great resources for this activity are [www.clickertraining.com](http://www.clickertraining.com) and [www.clickandtreat.com](http://www.clickandtreat.com). There are many tricks that can be taught while the dog remains lying down, such as nodding or shaking its head, opening its mouth on cue or teaching the dog to touch an object with its nose or paw.

Make sure any training is fun with lots of praise and healthy treats, such as bits of carrot, ice cubes, and other low calorie snacks. You can also use kibble taken out of the dog's daily meal allowance. Avoid overfeeding and weight gain during recovery.

We are more than happy to help troubleshoot any confinement problems that may arise and appreciate your efforts in creating an environment that is conducive to your pet's healing process