



FREE 7-DAY SAMPLE • WEEK 1 OF 4

The 30-Day Bored Dog Challenge

Ten minutes a day. Things you already own. A dog who's had a real job to do, and is ready for a nap.



- ✓ Week 1: nose games
- ✓ Week 2: homemade puzzles
- ✓ Week 3: brain and body
- ✓ Week 4: calm and real life
- ✓ 12 frozen lick recipes
- ✓ Tracker and weekly plan

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General enrichment ideas, not veterinary or behavioral advice.

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Start here (and your first game, in 10 minutes)

Safety first

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Which dog is yours? (puppies, seniors, big, small, chewers...)

THE GAMES

Week 1: The Nose

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Why a bored dog is a busy dog

Chewed shoes, barking at nothing, zoomies at 9pm, following you from room to room. Very often these aren't "bad" behaviors. They're a smart animal with nothing to do.

Your first game, right now (10 minutes). Don't read the whole guide first. Take a handful of your dog's next meal, say "find it", and scatter it across a rug, a towel or the lawn. Step back and watch the nose go to work. That's Day 1, and you've started.

Dogs were bred to work: to sniff things out, solve problems, carry, herd and guard. Most pet dogs now get two walks and a bowl of food that's gone in 40 seconds. A brisk walk on a short leash exercises the legs. It doesn't always give the brain much to do, and a busy brain needs work too. So every day for 30 days you'll give your dog one short, specific job, using things you already have: a towel, a muffin tin, a cardboard box, part of their dinner.

One check first. If the chewing, barking, restlessness or clinginess is new or sudden, see your vet before anything else. Pain and illness are common hidden causes of behavior changes.

HOW IT WORKS

One game a day

Do them in order: first the nose, then puzzles, then brain and body, then calm. Missed a day, or a week? Just carry on. There's no "behind", and nobody finishes every single one.

Use their meals

Most games run on your dog's normal food, taken out of today's portion. You're not adding calories. You're making dinner take ten minutes instead of one.

Easier or harder

Every game has an easier and a harder version. The right level is one where your dog succeeds within about a minute, then you nudge it up. Winning keeps them trying.

Check it off

Print the tracker and mark what your dog loved. By Day 30 you'll have their top five games, and that's all you need to keep going.

What to expect. Days 1 to 3: your dog may seem confused, or finish in seconds. Both are normal: they're learning that trying pays off. **By week 2:** many owners find their dog settles more easily after a game. Every dog is different, so use your tracker to see what's true

for yours. **By week 4:** you'll know what your dog loves and have a freezer full of quiet activities.

An honest note. Enrichment makes life better for almost every dog, but it isn't a cure for serious problems. If your dog panics when left alone, guards food or toys from people, or has bitten, please work with your vet and a qualified, force-free behavior professional, and ask them which of these games suit your dog. Food puzzles are not right for every dog who guards.

Safety first

These games are simple, but every dog is different. These rules keep them safe.

Stay in the room. Every DIY game here is a supervised game. Cardboard, towels and bottles are for shredding, rolling and rummaging, never for eating. When the food is gone, the item goes away.

If your dog swallows things, skip the paper, cardboard and fabric games. Use a large bath towel or a rubber food toy instead, and end each game the moment the food is finished. If your dog swallows something they shouldn't, call your vet right away. Don't wait for symptoms.

Size everything to your dog. Balls, toys and chews must be too big to swallow. For large and giant breeds, or any dog who crushes or chews tennis balls, use large rubber toys. We never use socks or small cloths as props: dogs swallow them.

More than one dog? Play every food game with dogs separated, behind a gate or in different rooms, and pick everything up before they're back together. Even best friends can argue over a muffin tin.

If your dog guards a game. Stiffening, freezing, eating faster, a hard stare, a lifted lip or a growl when you come near a puzzle, chew or bowl means "back off". Do back off. Never reach in, take it away or punish the growl. Next time give food games behind a gate, toss a treat away from the item before you pick it up, and keep children away. If it keeps happening, talk to your vet or a qualified force-free behavior professional.

Kids can help, with an adult. Children can hide, scatter food, design the course and check off the tracker, always with an adult actively watching. Adults only for anything where food is in a hand or near the dog's mouth (Which Hand?, Wait for It, Tug, Chin Rest, Middle), and keep children away from any dog who is eating, licking or chewing.

Heat and floors. On warm days play indoors or in shade, keep water out, and stop if your dog is panting hard. If the pavement is too hot for the back of your hand for seven seconds, it's too hot for paws. Do all movement games on carpet, a rug or a yoga mat: slippery floors cause injuries.

Know your emergencies. Save the number of your nearest 24-hour vet now. **Choking:** a dog who can't breathe or is pawing at their mouth needs help immediately. Learn the steps from the Red Cross or the AKC before you need them. **Bloat:** a swollen belly, retching with nothing coming up, drooling and restlessness is a life-threatening emergency, especially in large deep-chested dogs. Go straight to a vet.

This guide shares general enrichment ideas. It is not veterinary, nutritional or behavioral advice and is no substitute for a professional who knows your dog. All activities are done at your own risk and need adult supervision. You know your dog best: if a game doesn't seem right for them, skip it.

Food rules

Meals first. Take game food out of your dog's daily portion. All treats and extras together (including the frozen recipes) should stay under about **10% of daily calories**, and on days you use them, feed a little less dinner.

New foods: small and slow. Try a teaspoon first. Dairy and rich foods upset some dogs' stomachs. As a precaution, skip vigorous games for an hour either side of a big meal, especially with large, deep-chested breeds.

CHECK WITH YOUR VET FIRST IF YOUR DOG...

- **is on a prescription or food-allergy diet.**

Even a lick of another food can ruin a diet trial, so use only their own food: soaked, mashed and frozen.

- **has diabetes.** Meal timing and amounts matter, and the fruit recipes are out.
- **has had pancreatitis, or is a breed prone to it** (such as miniature schnauzers, Yorkies and cocker spaniels). Skip peanut butter, sardines and cheese.
- **has kidney or heart disease** (watch the salt), or **needs to lose weight.**

Raw-fed? Don't scatter raw food or leave it in puzzles. Use a washable mat or toy, freeze it, and wash it in hot soapy water afterward.

NEVER FEED THESE

- Xylitol (also labeled birch sugar or wood sugar): check every peanut butter, yogurt and "sugar-free" label
- Grapes, raisins and currants
- Chocolate, coffee, caffeine
- Onion, garlic, leeks, chives (including powders in broth, gravy and baby food)
- Macadamia nuts
- Alcohol, raw yeast dough and hops
- Moldy food, compost and anything from the trash
- Bones, corn cobs and fruit pits (choking and blockage)
- Avocado pit and skin, apple seeds
- Raw salmon or trout (can be deadly, mainly in the Pacific Northwest)
- Nutmeg, and anything very salty, fatty or sugary

If your dog eats something on this list, call your vet, the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center at (888) 426-4435, or Pet Poison Helpline at (855) 764-7661, right away. Both are open 24/7 and charge a fee. Don't wait for symptoms, and don't make your dog vomit unless a professional tells you to.

Your kit (you own most of it)

From around the house

- Large old bath towels and a blanket
- A muffin tin (or an egg carton)
- Cardboard boxes, egg cartons, paper tubes
- Three plastic cups
- An empty plastic water bottle
- A laundry basket
- Broom or mop handles
- A low, sturdy step or stool
- A baking tray and an ice-cube tray

Nice to have (not needed)

- A lick mat (a plate or baking tray works)
- A stuffable rubber toy with a hole at both ends, sized for your dog
- A snuffle mat (a towel works)
- A tug toy (a knotted bath towel works)
- A longer leash and a harness for sniff walks

Start with what you have. Buy something only if your dog turns out to love that kind of game.

HOW TO READ A DAY CARD

You need lists everything for that game, with a swap if you don't have it. **The steps** are the standard version: start there.

Make it easier / harder lets you fit the game to your dog. The difficulty dial on the next page tells you which to pick.

Why it works tells you what your dog is actually practicing, so you know what to look for.

Safety notes appear only where they matter. Please read them. The little box in the corner is for checking the day off.

When to play. The best time is just before you need your dog to be calm: before you start work, before dinner, before guests arrive, or early evening when the zoomies usually hit. Ten minutes of brain work, then a chew or a lick mat on their bed, often leads to a nap.

No time today? Scatter their dinner on a towel or in the yard. Thirty seconds of effort for you, several minutes of work for them. That counts, and it's a perfectly good day.

The difficulty dial

The most common mistake is making games too hard, too soon. Check this page any time a game isn't going well.

What you see	What it means	What to do
• Just right	Tail loose, nose down, trying different things, solves it in about a minute or two, wants another go.	Perfect. Next round, make it a touch harder.
• Too easy	Done in ten seconds, then looks at you for more.	Use the “make it harder” version, use smaller pieces of food, or spread the game over a bigger area.
• Too hard	Barking or whining at it, frantic pawing, looking back and forth between you and the puzzle, walking	Help once: show the food, open it up, hold it steady. Then switch to the “make it easier” version. Always end on a win.

away, lying down and staring at you.

● **Too wound up**

Grabbing hard at treats, jumping, barking at you, zooming, can't settle afterward.

Stop. Scatter a few pieces of food on the floor to bring the nose down, then give a lick mat on their bed. Next time pick a calmer game, keep it shorter and play earlier in the day. Dogs need rest as much as work.

● **Not interested**

Sniffs it and wanders off, or won't take the food.

Play before a meal, not after. Use smellier food (a little plain chicken). Show them once how it works. Some dogs have been told off for touching things: praise any interest at all. If refusing food is new for your dog, see your vet.

● **Eating the item**

Chewing and swallowing cardboard, paper, fabric or plastic instead of getting the food out.

Trade for a treat and end the game. Use one big towel or a rubber food toy for this kind of game, and see "Which dog is yours?" for the games to skip.

● **Worried**

Lip licking, turning away, scratching, a stiff body, backing off from a

That's worry, not boredom. Make it easier or stop. Let them approach new things in their own time and never lure them past fear.

new
object.

THREE WORDS WORTH TEACHING

"Yes"

Said the instant your dog gets it right, followed by a treat. It tells them exactly which moment earned the reward.

"Find it"

Your cue that food is hidden and the search is on. You'll use it from Day 1 and probably forever.

"All done"

Said with open, empty hands when a game ends. It saves your dog from hopefully staring at you for an hour.

Which dog is yours?

Every game works for most dogs with a small change. Find your dog here before you start.

Your dog	What to change
Puppies	Halve the time. Puppies need around 18–20 hours of sleep a day, and a wild, bitey puppy is usually overtired, not under-exercised: one short game, then a nap in their crate or pen. No jumping or raised poles, and keep tug feather-light while teething (about 3–6 months). Until your vet says vaccinations are complete, do the Sniffari and Field Trip in your yard or carried in your arms.
Seniors, or sore joints	Nose and licking games are perfect. Keep poles flat on the floor, keep “paws up” very low, use non-slip surfaces and skip spins.
Long-backed breeds (dachshunds, corgis, bassets)	Keep everything at floor or wrist height. No “paws up” on anything tall, no standing on back legs, no jumping. Nose, puzzle and licking games are ideal.
Flat-faced breeds	Keep sessions short and cool: they tire and overheat quickly. Shallow lick surfaces are easier than deep toys.

Giant and very strong dogs	Scale everything up: a storage tub instead of a muffin tin, big rubber toys instead of tennis balls, bath towels instead of paper. Expect cardboard games to last seconds, so use them as a quick treat, not the main event.
Tiny dogs	Use their smallest kibble, a mini muffin tin or egg carton, a hand towel folded once, and a saucer instead of a tray. Count calories carefully: their whole daily treat budget can be one teaspoon of peanut butter.
Power chewers and swallows	Skip or adapt: Day 6 Dig Box (use one big towel instead of paper), Day 9 Rattle Bottle, Day 11 Egg Carton, Day 12 Paper Tube Parcels. Use rubber food toys, big towels and the nose, trick and mat games instead.
Apartments and quiet hours	Almost everything here is quiet and needs only a few feet of floor. Play the Rattle Bottle on carpet or swap it for a towel game, and do movement games on a rug so neighbors don't hear them.
On a diet or a vet diet	Use only their measured daily food for every game, and make "Dinner on Ice" your only frozen recipe. See "Food rules".
Nervous dogs	Let them approach new objects in their own time. Never push, lure

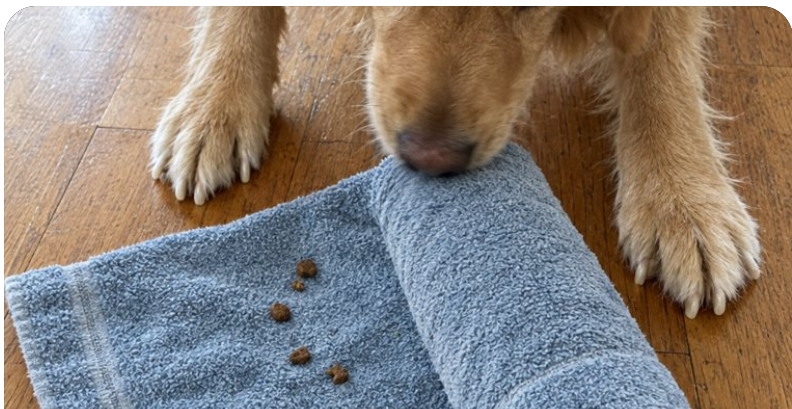
over fear or laugh off a worried dog. Easy wins, lots of choice.

Deaf dogs

Swap "yes" for a thumbs-up or a quick hand flash. Everything else works as written. Approach where they can see you.

Blind or low-vision dogs

Nose games are their superpower. Keep furniture where it is, use smellier food, tap the floor near hidden food, and skip the poles and the course.



DAYS 1-7

Week 1: The Nose

A dog's nose is their main way of reading the world. Many trainers find that ten minutes of sniffing settles a dog as well as a much longer walk, and a small 2019 study found that dogs given regular nose games became more "optimistic". This week needs almost nothing: a handful of food and things you already own.

DAY 1

Scatter Feed

🕒 5-10 min



You need: Part of today's dry food. A lawn, rug or towel.

Wet or raw food? Smear it on a washable mat or tray instead.

1. Take a handful of your dog's normal food.
2. Say "find it" and scatter it across grass, a rug or a spread-out towel.
3. Step back and let them hunt every piece. Don't point or help.
4. When they finish, scatter a second, smaller handful a little wider.

MAKE IT EASIER

Drop the food in a small area on a bare floor where it's easy to see.

MAKE IT HARDER

Longer grass, a bigger area, or toss while your dog waits behind a door, then release them.

Why it works: Hunting for food with the nose is what dogs are built to do. It slows fast eaters down and can turn a 30-second meal into several minutes of work.

Safety: Skip the lawn if it has been treated with fertilizer or weed killer, or has mushrooms, cocoa mulch, or slug or rodent bait.

DAY 2

The Towel Roll-Up

 5 min

You need: A large old bath towel. Dry food or small treats.

1. Lay the towel flat and sprinkle food along its length.
2. Roll it up loosely like a sleeping bag.
3. Put it down and let your dog unroll it with nose and paws.
4. Re-roll and repeat two or three times.

MAKE IT EASIER

Roll it very loosely with food visible at the open end.

MAKE IT HARDER

Roll tighter, fold the roll in half, or tie one loose knot in the middle.

Why it works: Your dog has to work out that pushing makes food appear. Simple cause and effect is the first step to real problem-solving.

Safety: Use a big towel, never a washcloth or sock, and pick it up when the food is gone.

DAY 3

Find It

 10 min

You need: Ten small treats or pieces of food. One room.

1. Scatter three pieces on the floor. While your dog eats them, place 5 more in easy spots nearby: beside a chair leg, on a low step, on the edge of a rug.
2. Say “find it” and let them search. Stay quiet and let the nose work.
3. Round two: have someone hold your dog, or step out of sight, while you hide the pieces.
4. Finish with an easy one so the last search is a quick win.

MAKE IT EASIER

Hide only three pieces, all in plain sight.

MAKE IT HARDER

Use two rooms, hide at nose height (on a low shelf edge), or hide one piece under a plastic cup.

Why it works: This becomes a game for life. Once your dog knows “find it”, you can give them a real job in any room, in any weather.

DAY 4

The Muffin Tin

 5–10 min

You need: A muffin tin. Tennis balls, or dog toys too big for your dog to swallow. Dry food.

No muffin tin? Use an egg carton, or six cups on a baking tray.

1. Drop a few pieces of food in each cup of the tin.
2. Cover every cup with a ball or toy.
3. Put it on the floor and let your dog work out how to lift the covers.
4. Refill and cover only half the cups, so they have to sniff out which ones pay.

MAKE IT EASIER

Cover only two or three cups and leave the rest open.

MAKE IT HARDER

Cover all cups but put food in only three. Now it's a nose game, not a guessing game.

Why it works: Your dog learns to move an object to get a reward, the skill behind every puzzle toy in a pet store. This one costs nothing.

Safety: Use covers too big for your dog to swallow. For large and giant breeds, or any dog who crushes, chews or pulls the fuzz off tennis balls, use large rubber toys or upturned plastic cups. Never use socks: swallowed socks are a common cause of emergency surgery.

DAY 5

Which Hand?

 5 min

You need: Small treats.

1. Show your dog a treat, then close it in one fist. Hold out both fists.
2. Wait. When they sniff or nudge the correct hand with their nose, say “yes” and open it.
3. If they choose the empty hand, open it to show nothing, close it, and wait again.
4. Swap hands at random. Do ten rounds.

MAKE IT EASIER

Keep the treat hand closer to their nose.

MAKE IT HARDER

Hold your fists apart at arm's length, or put your hands behind your back to swap before presenting.

Why it works: A tiny scent-detection task. It teaches your dog to trust their nose over their eyes, and to stay polite around hands holding food.

Safety: Reward a nose touch, not pawing or teeth. Mouthy dog? Wait with a still, closed fist until they soften. Adults only for this one.

DAY 6

The Dig Box

🕒 10 min



You need: A cardboard box. Scrunched packing paper or a large old bath towel. Dry food.

1. Fill the box loosely with scrunched paper (or one big towel).
2. Sprinkle food through the layers so some sinks to the bottom.
3. Let your dog dig, shove and burrow to find it.
4. Shredding is part of the fun. Let it happen, then clean up the mess together.

MAKE IT EASIER

Use a shallow box or tray with just a few pieces of paper.

MAKE IT HARDER

A deeper box, more filling, or nest a second smaller box inside with the best treats in it.

Why it works: Digging and shredding are natural dog behaviors that usually get dogs into trouble. Here they're allowed, which most dogs find very satisfying.

Safety: Shredding is fine, swallowing is not. If your dog eats cardboard or paper, swap to one large bath towel and end the game when the food is gone. Remove tape, staples, labels and plastic windows first.

DAY 7

The Sniffari

 10–20 min

You need: A leash (a longer one if you have it), clipped to a harness. Somewhere with grass or hedges.

1. Go for a walk with one rule: your dog chooses the route and the speed.
2. When they stop to sniff, you stop. Wait until they finish. Count slowly if you need to.
3. No heel, no hurrying, no destination. Follow the nose (within safe limits).
4. Notice how they are when you get home compared with a normal walk.

MAKE IT EASIER

Do it in your own yard or along one quiet stretch of sidewalk.

MAKE IT HARDER

Go somewhere brand new: a different street, a field edge, the grassy edge of a quiet parking lot.

Why it works: A sniff walk covers less distance, but many dogs come home more relaxed. One field study found dogs' pulse rates dropped while they sniffed. Getting to choose is rare in a dog's day, and that matters.

Safety: Clip a long leash to a harness, never to a collar, and skip retractable leashes. Keep your dog leashed near roads and watch what they sniff: no dropped food, litter or other dogs' mess.

WEEK 1: THE NOSE

Week 1 check-in

- Which game did your dog finish fastest? Make that one harder next time.
- Which one did they stick with longest? That's their favorite kind of work.
- Did evenings feel any different on the days you played? Note it in your tracker.

If it wasn't going well: Most dogs take to nose games instantly. If yours gave up quickly, the games were too hard, not your dog too slow. Use the “make it easier” version and build up.

Three more weeks are waiting



If your dog enjoyed the nose games, the rest of the challenge takes it much further.

Week 2: Puzzles

The Cup Game, the Rattle Bottle, Egg Carton Surprise, Bobbing for Dinner and more homemade puzzles that get your dog problem-solving.

Week 3: Brain and body

Touch, Spin, Paws Up, Broomstick Steps, Chin Rest and "101 Things to Do With a Box".

Week 4: Calm and real life

Go to Your Mat, Tug With Rules, Wait for It, and taking it all out into the world.

Plus

12 frozen lick recipes with a calorie guide, the printable tracker, the after-Day-30 weekly plan, a certificate, and a phone edition.

Get the full 30-Day Bored Dog Challenge

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