

Why owning a dog is good for you and your health?

Many of us during the current pandemic lockdown have found out why dogs are called 'man's best friend'.

Research has shown that owning a dog can have a number of physical and mental health benefits including:

- **Increased cardiovascular health.** This can include lower blood pressure, lower triglycerides and, in men, lower cholesterol.
- **Increased physical activity.** Dogs help us get out and enjoy the outdoors while getting some regular exercise. Owning a dog can be a real game changer for activity levels, particularly among elderly people. Studies in the UK suggest that people with dogs had increased their exercise and had fewer health problems compared with people who did not have dogs. Studies indicate that dog owners on average walk 22 more minutes more per day compared to people without dogs.
- **Dogs can help lower stress.** Patting/stroking a dog provides an opportunity to relax and you can feel your anxieties fade away.
- **Owning a dog can help us improve sociability.** Dogs can be great conversation starters even with today's social distancing dogs have the ability to help us create connections with complete strangers. How many times have you been out and people commented on your dog and this has become a great conversation starter!
- **Dogs can help support dementia care.** Animal based therapy has become very popular in many residential care homes because stroking dogs can decrease agitated behaviours and increase social interaction. A good thing with old people owning pets is it can also alleviate isolation and improve their mental health.

Now we've looked at the benefits of owning a dog for humans. How do we keep our dogs happy and stimulated during these current times?

Many dogs are used to being walked/exercised 2/3 times per day, but with only one exercise period allowed once per day, it is a good idea to find other ways to exercise your dog and keep them stimulated whilst in the home.

So what are the signs of Boredom in Dogs?

Boredom in dogs is a lot like boredom in kids. Remember those boring summer days when your parents were busy or gone, and you had no friends to play with – which gave you two choices. If your parents were home, you may have pestered them relentlessly. How many dogs at the minute follow you round the house and torment you from boredom? Or, if the parents aren't around, you *find* something to do!! Generally something which you shouldn't. In dogs this could be chewing or barking.

So with only one walk per day here are some ideas which will also give you something to occupy yourself for a few hours if you run out of things to do around the house.

Puzzle/treat Toys

Puzzle toys are great for occupying a dog when you just don't have the time or you want to have some free time without having to entertain your dogs. They can be a great way to feed them their meals that will last longer than two seconds. However, if you have a problem-solving dog you may find, that your dog figures out the puzzles pretty quickly and then after that, they don't take much longer than a normal feed bowl. If you are talented, you can try to make your own and that can be fun during these long days in lockdown. You could try making Snuffle mats. A snuffle mat is an easy way to provide your dog with interactive entertainment and an opportunity to tap into their natural instinct for sniffing. Sniffing doesn't seem very interesting activity to us but for your dog it may be one of their favourite pastimes. Enjoy them snuffling their way to find hidden rewards within the mat.



If you are interested in making a snuffle mat, check out this great website link:

<http://www.supernovadogs.com/2016/10/21/make-your-own-snuffle-mat/>

One of my dog's favourite toys is the Kong wobbler treat dispenser. It has a weighted base making it a bit harder to knock around and the amount of food that comes out varies.

Sometimes she gets one piece, sometimes several. I find it keeps her occupied longer than anything else I have tried.

Training on little home-made agility courses in your garden great fun for both you and your dog. This tires a dog out just like doing maths makes your kids sleepy and mentally exhausts them. It uses brain power which can be more effective than a run with some dogs. If you have found your dog *more hyped* after activity, this may be a better option for you. Making time for a few training sessions a day will help keep boredom at bay things and you can include things like teaching your dogs a new trick.

If you are interested in teaching an old dog new tricks, check out this website link with 52 tricks to teach your dogs:

<https://doggiebuddy.com/topics/Trainingtopics/traintopic3.html>

If you are interested in making some obstacles or a DIY Dog Agility Courses check out this website for some tips and tricks: <https://www.k9ofmine.com/diy-dog-agility-courses/>

Most of you will have noticed the increase in dogs out and about since the current lockdown has come into force. While you are out exercising with your dog or even sitting at home watching passers by, you may see that many roads and streets are full of people exercising, with lots of dogs.

Let's test your doggie knowledge and let us also teach you some interesting facts about dogs.

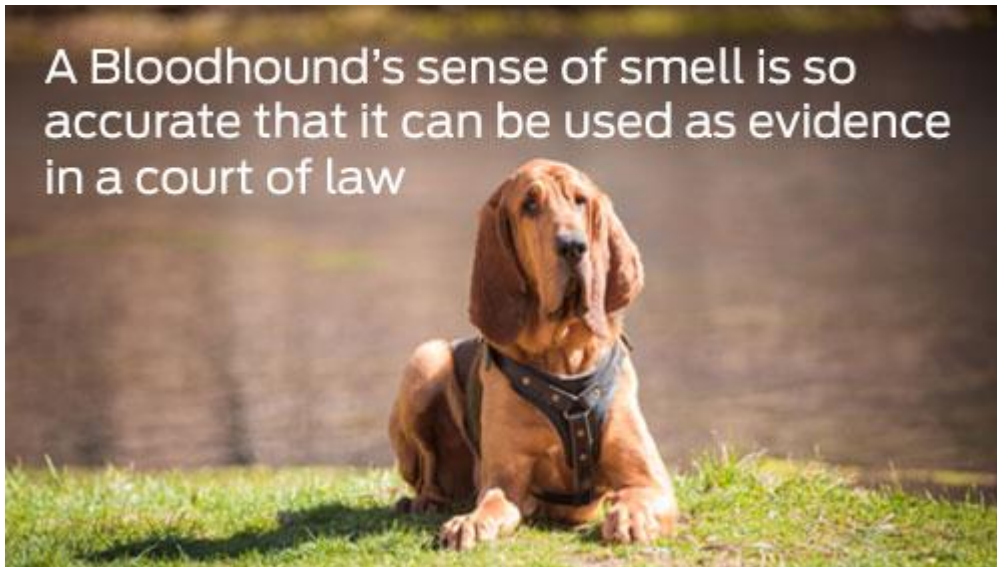
Answers to the quiz at the bottom of the page

Be on the look-out for **Brachycephalic breeds**; they are flat faced and have pronounced eyes eg English bulldogs, Pugs, Pekingese, French bulldogs.



1. The shape of a dog's face suggests how long it will live. Which breeds do you think live the longest?

2. Dog nose prints are as unique as _____? and can be used to identify them.



Dogs can smell about 1,000-10,000 times better than humans. While humans have 5 million smell-detecting cells, dogs have more than 220 million. The part of the brain that interprets smell is also four times larger in dogs than in humans. Some dogs can smell dead bodies under water, where termites are hiding, and natural gas buried under 40 feet of dirt. Some studies suggest that they can even detect cancer that is too small to be detected by a doctor and can find lung cancer by sniffing a person's breath. Dogs have a wet nose to collect more of the tiny droplets of smelling chemicals in the air.

3. Different smells in a dog's urine can tell other dogs what?
4. Dogs are about as smart as what age of a child? This means they can understand about 150-200 words, including signals and hand movements with the same meaning as words.
5. The most intelligent dogs are reportedly the B _____ C _____ and the P _____, while the least intelligent dogs are the Afghan Hound and the Basenji.
6. The tallest breed of dog is 44 inches. Do you know the breed?
7. A _____ could beat a cheetah in a race and keep a speed of 35mph for 7 miles. Can you name the breed of dog?

8. Around 30% of this breed are deaf in one ear and 5% deaf in both. This is due to something called the extreme piebald gene which is responsible for their white coat and blue eyes in some. This is a spotted breed whose spots should be no bigger than 10pence piece. What's the breed?
9. There are 2 breeds which have fully black tongues. The cause is unknown. Can you name the breeds?
10. If you thought all dogs barked, then prepare yourself for this dog fact. This breed doesn't tend to bark; it yodels. Can you name the breed?

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Correct answers

1. Dogs with sharp pointed faces like wolves. 2. Human finger prints. 3. Whether the dog leaving the message is female or male, old or young, sick or healthy, happy or angry 4. 2/3year old 5. Border Collie, Poodle 6. Great Dane 7. Greyhound 8. Dalmatian. 9. Shar Pei and Chow Chow. 10. Basenji.

Please note that the web sites recommended are the personal opinion of the tutor