Cold, wet, and dark winter days can make it challenging to keep your dog active, engaged, and fit – wouldn’t it be nice just to hibernate? It’s important to keep your dog’s body moving and brain engaged, especially when outdoor fun is on pause. Getting yourself and your dog off the couch can help you stay healthy, too. There are many dog-friendly indoor activities to get your pup moving, have fun, and strengthen your bond.

It’s important to keep in mind that while many of our furry friends are not exactly high-performing canine athletes, some also have physical ailments or other health conditions that make exercise difficult. Conditions like osteoarthritis can make activity uncomfortable for your dog, so be sure to confirm with your veterinarian that your pup has the “green light” for a new exercise plan.

**Indoor Activities for Dogs to Engage Their Body and Mind**

1. **Hide-and-seek.** This game is a great way to get the whole family involved, and it also does double duty practicing your dog’s come-when-called behavior. Start easy with hide-and-seek by stepping just around a corner and then calling your dog to come. Celebrate enthusiastically when they find you with tons of praise, petting, toy playing, and treats.

   As your dog starts to figure out your strategy, hide further away or in more difficult hiding spots, such as behind a door in a different room, in the shower or bathtub, or in a closet with the door mostly closed. They’ll start to put their nose to work and sniff you out. Give your dog hints as needed with a whistle or tap of the foot, and always be sure to reward them for finding you with praise and treats.
2. **Find it.** Winter is the perfect time to put your dog's nose to work with scent-based games, which are also good for mental stimulation and building confidence. This game is similar to hide-and-seek, but now your dog is searching for a treat you've hidden somewhere in your home. Start easy by using a favorite toy of theirs, a yummy treat, or a stuffed interactive food toy. If you’re using treats for this game, the more stinky, the better. Give your dog a whiff of the target before you hide it and then give them the cue, "Find it!" Praise them when they sniff out their prize and let them eat the treat or play a game with the toy. Help them search if needed, especially when you start to hide the prize in harder-to-find places.

3. **DIY indoor agility courses.** Look around your home to find items and a safe place to create an indoor agility course for your dog. Set up low-height jump obstacles (think books or pillows) on the floor and lure your dog over them with a treat. Use large plastic bottles (or cones if you have them) to create a weave obstacle or a maze for your dog to complete. You can even create a crawl tunnel using chairs and entice your dog to go through it. If you’d rather purchase agility equipment, there are many options available online for indoor obstacles that don't take up much space. It’s all about having fun, keeping your dog moving, and engaging their brain!

4. **Two feet up.** This fitness game is all about building up your dog’s hind end muscles by having them stand with their two front paws on some type of elevated platform. Start easy with a book that’s only one or two inches off the floor before slowly working up to something higher like a stack of books or a stool.

   Grab a few tasty treats and place the book on the floor. Use a treat in front of your dog's nose to guide them up onto the book. When their feet are on the book, say “Yes!” and toss the treat on the floor for them to eat. This way, they get off the book and you’re ready for the next rep.

   With practice, add a verbal cue like "Feet up" as your dog puts their two paws on the platform, acknowledge with a "Yes!" and reward with a treat. As they get used to this exercise, you can begin holding the position longer before rewarding and slowly increasing the platform’s height. If your dog is into this game, you can eventually transition to a balance disc or board.

5. **Sit pretty.** Asking your dog to “sit pretty” (or beg) works their core muscles
and balance. Have your dog sit on a non-slip surface like a yoga mat. Hold a treat or a toy in front of their nose and raise it slowly up an inch or two until they raise both front paws slightly off the ground. Time for reward and praise! Practice for a minute or two at a time, slowly building up to where your dog is in the sit pretty position, comfortably balanced straight over their hind end while staying seated. For dogs that seem reluctant or unable to lift their front legs fully off the ground, teaching them to “shake” with one front leg at a time (see below) can be a great compromise.

6. Standing leg lifts. This is a great balance-building indoor activity for your dog. The goal is for your dog to “shake” with each of their four paws when asked, balancing their weight on the other three legs. Start with your dog standing on a non-slip surface (like a yoga mat). Front paws are usually easier to practice since many dogs know the shake trick. Present your hand for a shake, say “Yes” when your dog’s paw touches your hand and give them a treat. For back paws, you can start with gently lifting a back paw slightly off the ground.

As you practice this with your dog, aim for holding this three-legged balance for three to five seconds. If your dog doesn’t lift a paw, that’s okay! Don’t force a paw up, and don’t make them hold it for longer than they’re comfortable. Whenever you lift a paw, support the elbow joint or knee joint with your other hand.

It’s easy to keep your dog fit, physically and mentally, even if you’re stuck indoors. Use some of these ideas to work up your pup’s brains, noses, and muscles. You may even come up with new ideas of your own. Always pay attention to your dog’s comfort and enjoyment level and keep the praise and treats coming!

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