Behavior Solutions: Hyperactivity

Playing with a dog that loves to run and frolic, or just watching him from the sidelines, is one of the delights of having a canine companion. But maybe your dog doesn't ever want to take a break. Maybe he wants to keep playing catch long after your elbow is ready for the ice pack, or he literally runs circles around you when he is off-lead. If your dog is like the Energizer Bunny and just keeps going, and going, and going, he may not be just active—he may be hyperactive.

Hyperactive or Just Overactive?

Most dogs enjoy intense physical activity, and a dog that seems overly active usually just needs more exercise and attention. An under-exercised or under-stimulated dog is sometimes mistakenly thought to be hyperactive, though true hyperactivity is relatively rare. Many dogs are highly active as puppies and young adults, but with proper raising, they become calmer as they mature. Particularly energetic breeds, such as border collies, can make ideal companions for people with physical lifestyles, but may not be the best choice for people with more sedentary lives.

If you give your dog plenty of attention, mental stimulation and exercise, and he still seems to bounce off the walls in search of an outlet—any outlet, good or bad—for his energy, you may have a hyperactive dog. This condition, stemming from a chemical imbalance, is relatively rare and only your veterinarian or a behaviorist can confirm the diagnosis. The hallmarks of hyperactivity include a pattern of unruly behavior and resistance to obedience training. The hyperactive dog may indulge in destructive chewing or digging, may bark excessively or chase his tail. He also may mutilate himself through compulsive licking or chewing. The hyperactive dog remains wired even at an age when most dogs slow down.

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At Starmark Animal Behavior Center, we have found that dogs are not necessarily born overactive, but they may become so through a lack of adequate physical exertion or mental stimulation. A proper combination of training and exercise can lead to a calmer dog.

Picking a Pup

Part of being a successful dog owner is finding a dog that fits you and your lifestyle. Certain breeds tend to be more active and physical than others, and require a lot of stimulation. Dogs have been bred for centuries to perform jobs alongside people, and these working traits are still a part of their makeup, even if they are non-working pets. Dogs that have been bred for work—such as keeping vermin out of a barn, guarding a house or herding—tend to be happiest when they have a "job," whether it is the one they were bred for or just a daily session of ball retrieval and obedience training. In general, these breeds are not suited to being left alone for long periods and do not cope well with sustained inactivity.

Highly active dogs are found in all breed categories, from sporting dogs to toys. Mixed breeds can be calm or highly active. For more information on finding a breed to fit your lifestyle, refer to Starmark's "Behavior Solutions: Breed Selection." Potential dog owners should do their homework before getting a dog to ensure that they and their canine companion will be a good match.

Effecting a Positive Change

When faced with an overactive dog, many people do the wrong thing by trying to solve the problem through confinement or isolation. Often, that makes matters worse because a confined

dog has even less of the interaction he craves and even fewer outlets for his energy. He may become even more frantic and destructive. The behavior and training specialists at Starmark have often found that the problem of overactivity can be nipped in the bud or prevented by beginning obedience training as early as possible. Having short, daily obedience training sessions with lots of calm praise and food rewards is essential to keeping your dog's mind stimulated and giving him the interaction that he needs.

Training is communication, and with patience and consistency your dog will learn what is expected of him. Teach your young puppy to "settle on cue" by getting him excited with play or a toy and then calming him down and rewarding him with a food treat. Additionally, you can teach your dog the "boundary stay" or "place" command, which means that your dog learns to stay quietly in a particular area of your home (usually on a dog bed in a room where you can supervise him). While in a boundary stay, your dog can have a toy or something to chew on. You may quietly reward your dog with periodic food treats and praise for remaining calm on his place. This will help your dog understand that when he is in the house, he is expected to stay calm and quiet and that outside is reserved for play. The Pro-Training Clicker is a quick and easy way to teach your dog obedience commands such as settle and place. Visit our Web site www.starmarkacademy.com to view free streaming video lessons on these and other obedience training topics.

In addition to teaching your dog what behaviors are acceptable in the house, be sure that he gets enough exercise. Take him for daily walks; play catch with him using toys like the Starmark EasyGlide Durafoam Disc; participate in agility, tracking or herding; or engage in any other activity that he enjoys and that allows him to expend energy. You can even play hide and seek with your dog to improve his recall skills. Hide somewhere in your house and call your dog.

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When he finds you, praise and reward him with a treat. If you must leave your dog unsupervised for long periods, hide toys, such as Starmark's Everlasting Treat Ball, around your house or yard. You can fill these toys with treats or with his meal to give him a hunting game to play while you are away. Another option is to take your dog to a doggie day-care center, which will provide him with exercise and attention. Refer to Starmark's "Behavior Solutions: Problem Prevention" for more ideas on keeping your dog occupied.

A small number of dogs do have a hyperactivity disorder and may not respond to the techniques above. If you feel this is the case with your dog, consult your veterinarian.

Calmer Canines

An active dog can be wonderful fun—a clown and a companion and a teammate for your sporting activities. At Starmark we believe that a well-behaved and well-trained dog is a happy dog and a better companion. Each dog is unique, and so is his owner. That's why we use a variety of techniques, customizing your dog's training experience to suit his personality and your individual needs. Using our training techniques, which emphasize consistency and patience, you can have a frisky playmate that knows when it's time to relax.

Trainer Developed: Academy Tested

The certified training and behavior specialists at Starmark Animal Behavior Center created this behavior solutions guide with you and your dog's needs in mind. Products mentioned in this guide are available at pet supply retailers, as well as online at our web site:

www.aboutdogtraining.com. All products, guides and videos are tested and approved by the

training directors of Starmark Academy, our accredited school for professional dog trainers. It is the hands-on experience of our training division, combined with the vast technical knowledge and experience of the Starmark Academy staff that allows us to bring you useful and unique dog training and behavior solutions. We train dogs just like yours every day; we work with owners just like you every day. Thank you for choosing Starmark, the world leader in pet education.

For additional pet solutions and information about our products, please visit Starmark online at our web sites: www.aboutdogtraining.com; www.schoolfordogtrainers.com; and www.starmarkacademy.com.

Starmark Trainer Recommended Equipment

Everlasting Treat Ball—A great way to keep your active dog busy. The unique shape of the ball allows it to wobble and roll on its own. It is hollow, so you can also hide treats or a meal in it. Hide it around the house to make your dog hunt for his treats like the wild dog that he is.

<u>Everlasting Treats</u>—Chew treats designed to fit on the ends of the Everlasting Treat Ball. They also are great by themselves as tasty snacks.

<u>Pro-Training Treats</u>— Bite-sized treats that fit inside the Everlasting Treat Ball. Used alone, these treats are perfect as tasty food rewards during training.

<u>EasyGlide Durafoam Disc</u>— New, easy-flying disc made of soft, puncture-resistant material that won't hurt your dog's mouth. It's the perfect toy for burning off energy during afternoon frolics.

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<u>Pro-Training Clicker</u>— A fast and easy way to teach your dog obedience commands. It's like saying, "Well done," on time, every time your dog does something you like.

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