

High-Energy Game Cards

Games for a dog with more engine than your living room.

01

Flirt pole

CHASE GAMES THAT DON'T WRECK JOINTS

A lure on a line on a pole. You sweep it along the ground, your dog chases and catches, you trade for a treat. It delivers the entire predatory sequence — eye, stalk, chase, grab — in a space the size of a living room rug, and the output per minute is enormous.

Watch: Keep the lure on the ground. Skip it for dogs under a year, and for any dog who can't let go on cue.

02

Uphill-only fetch

CHASE GAMES THAT DON'T WRECK JOINTS

Throw up a slope; your dog walks back down. Same game, far more cardiovascular cost per throw, and almost none of the skidding stops that make flat fetch risky. If you only change one thing on this page, change this.

03

Two-toy fetch

CHASE GAMES THAT DON'T WRECK JOINTS

Throw toy A. The moment your dog turns, show toy B and call. Swap, repeat. It keeps the drive of fetch, trains recall and trading at the same time, and lets you cap the number of reps instead of going until someone gives up.

04

Restrained recall relay

CHASE GAMES THAT DON'T WRECK JOINTS

Two people, thirty metres apart. One holds the dog by the harness while the other calls. Release, sprint, reward, reverse. Full-speed straight lines with no hard braking, and your recall gets better every rep.

05

Spring pole

CHASE GAMES THAT DON'T WRECK JOINTS

A tug toy on a bungee hung from a branch or beam, so your dog can play tug alone. Self-directed, builds grip and rear-end strength, and they control the intensity. Hang it so their feet stay on the ground.

Watch: Not for puppies.

06

Sprinkler or hose chase

CHASE GAMES THAT DON'T WRECK JOINTS

An oscillating sprinkler gives them something to chase that never quite ends, with no object to catch and no sudden stop.

Watch: Stop if your dog can't disengage — a few become genuinely obsessive about water jets.

...9 more.

07

Canicross or bikejor

CHASE GAMES THAT DON'T WRECK JOINTS

Your dog pulls ahead in a harness while you run or ride. The highest-volume aerobic option there is, with no stop-start loading at all.

Watch: Fully grown dogs only – 18 to 24 months in big breeds – and get a vet check first.

08

Dragged scent trail

NOSE AND HUNTING GAMES

Drag a food-scented sock fifty to a hundred metres across a field, hide a jackpot at the end, release your dog. Sustained movement plus hard nose work. This tires most dogs faster than walking the same distance.

09

Barn-hunt style tube search

NOSE AND HUNTING GAMES

Hide a scented tube in a maze of cardboard boxes or straw bales and let them hunt. Sniffing, climbing and burrowing at once. Terriers in particular find this exhausting in the best way.

10

Dig pit

NOSE AND HUNTING GAMES

A sandbox or child's paddling pool filled with sand, with toys buried in it. Digging is powerfully self-reinforcing, burns real energy, and this is the difference between a channelled behaviour and a destroyed lawn.

11

Paddling pool bobbing

NOSE AND HUNTING GAMES

Floating toys and treats in a few inches of water. Cooling, low-impact, and completely novel for most dogs. The best hot-weather option on this list.

12

Shaping sessions

BRAIN GAMES THAT ACTUALLY TIRE THEM

Ten minutes of free-shaping – marking and rewarding tiny steps toward a new behaviour, like circling a cone or putting two paws in a box. Most high-energy dogs are under-stimulated rather than under-exercised. Concentrated problem-solving produces a calm, genuine tiredness that running rarely does.

...3 more.

13

Treibball

BRAIN GAMES THAT ACTUALLY TIRE THEM

Your dog learns to nose-push large exercise balls toward a goal. Herding-breed catnip: physical and cognitive at once, no impact loading, works in a small space. It takes real training to build the first push, which is part of the appeal.

14

Canine parkour

BRAIN GAMES THAT ACTUALLY TIRE THEM

Cue your dog onto, under, over and through safe real-world objects – benches, logs, low walls. Body awareness, confidence, problem-solving, and you set the intensity.

Watch: Keep heights at or below elbow height and never let them jump down.

15

Named-toy retrieval

BRAIN GAMES THAT ACTUALLY TIRE THEM

Teach toy names one at a time, then send them to fetch by name from a pile. A project that scales for months. It's the closest a pet dog gets to learning language, and it's genuinely hard work for them.

your own

your own

your own