



## Avoid the Winter Blues....and Weight Gain

Not many people like the winter months; it's cold, dreary, and....**COLD!** Some dogs are on the same page as their owners when it comes to staying indoors during the winter months and cuddling in front of a warm fire, but some breeds, such as German Shepherds, love the change in weather and that first snowfall is like Christmas morning all over again. It's important to stay active throughout the entire year not just for our own personal health, but for the health of our furry friends too. In this edition of Wellness Wednesday we will go over some ways to stay active, stimulate the brain, and possible risks of hibernating through winter.

### Fun winter time activities

- **Snow Day!** When the snowflakes start falling, bundle up and go outside. Make puppy snow angels, throw some snow balls, and have fun. Romping around in the snow is a great cardio workout for you and Fido and if the snow is deep enough you can even get a good leg work out too.
  - Cautions – avoid going outside for prolonged periods if the temperatures are significantly below freezing or if the wind is strong.
  - Also watch for snowball formation on your pet's fur and/or ice impaction between their toes.
- Too cold to go outside? **Try a treadmill.** It's easy for humans to go to a gym to stay in shape....teach Rover how to use a treadmill. Start slow and don't force it; if they don't like it do not stress them out by making them stay on the treadmill. Check out these helpful links for introducing the treadmill in a healthy and positive way.
  - [http://www.mndogtraining.com/article\\_treadmill.html](http://www.mndogtraining.com/article_treadmill.html)
  - [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-karen-becker/treadmill-pets\\_b\\_4108635.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-karen-becker/treadmill-pets_b_4108635.html)
- Set aside some time in your day for **playtime.** Set aside at least 30 minutes to an hour in your evening plans for one-on-one time with your pet and play....fetch down the hall way, hide and seek, tug-of-war, or whatever your pet enjoys. This is a good way to keep your pet active and is a good bonding activity.





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- **Simulate the brain** – keep the brain engaged by creating puzzles for your pet to work through, working/training for treats, hide treats/toys around the house for your pet to find. Some pet stores also sell doggie puzzles if you can't find ways to create one that can challenge their brains.
  - <https://www.pinterest.com/search/?q=dog%20puzzles>
- Get into the car and **go somewhere**. Some cities have indoor canine training facilities that are open for training, playgroups, and/or agility. Some retail stores also allow pets inside allowing you to walk a few laps around the store; this also gives you a way to work on leash training, basic manners, and socialization skills.
  - Call ahead to double check your local store but here is list of common retail stores that allow pets: <http://barkpost.com/dog-friendly-stores/>
- **Get outside when it's nice** – when we get that amazing break from winter's grip and the temps creep above 40°, or even the celebration worthy 50°, get outside and go for a walk or head to the park.
  - If it has snowed recently and there might be ice melt or salt on the roads and sidewalks, make sure to wipe your pets feet off once you get home to avoid salt ingestion, which has the potential to be toxic.



#### **Risks of staying cooped up inside for 4 months**

- *Weight gain* - If pets stay on their normal diet rations through winter but their activity level decreases they can easily gain a few pounds. That extra weight can affect the joints, back, and/or normal physiologic function of the organs.
- *Muscle atrophy* – if you don't use it, you lose it. Loss of muscle mass can lead to injuries in the spring when you finally emerge for the first dog park trip of the year.
- If you bring a puppy home during winter it can be *hard to socialize* and train him/her if you stay home all the time – take your puppy to obedience classes, public places, and indoor playtimes to properly socialize your puppy with other animals and people.



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