

# ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT FOR DOGS

## *What is environmental enrichment?*

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Environmental enrichment is the provision of stimuli (things or events, like people, objects and activities), which promotes the expression of natural behaviour. These stimuli and their corresponding behaviours are critical to the health and welfare of your greyhound.

Thousands of years of domestication and artificial selection produced canine breeds with modified **social repertoires**. Many dogs have **breed-specific behaviour** that appears to be hard-wired. The greyhound is a **visually orientated animal**. They will be stimulated by anything that moves, particularly at a distance (or on the horizon).

## THINGS DOGS LIKE AND WILL WORK FOR

**Primary reinforcers** for greyhounds include food, water, sexual stimulation, foraging, sniffing, scenting, attention, grooming, coolness and warmth (depending on the weather). Primary reinforcers often have to do with biological processes.

Some primary reinforcers are not immediately obvious. For example, if your greyhound is restrained in your kennel and cannot move about or get out, the chance of freedom can be very reinforcing. So a speedy escape once the gate is open can be a lot of fun!

It's important to learn what your greyhound likes and what he/she will work for. This will help you have a stimulated and well-adjusted dog. If your

Greyhounds are also **opportunists** and will adapt to their location and environment by using a wide variety of **reinforcers**.

Even though a greyhound may spend a considerable portion of their time inactive, a predictable and limiting environment may make these non-active periods boring, such as long periods in a kennel. During times like this, you may see an overall decrease in interaction with their environment. Under-stimulated greyhounds may lie down and sleep more, and spend significantly more time sitting.

greyhound is under-stimulated, they may become bored, anxious and even aggressive. Being bored and anxious may result in abnormal behaviours.

**Abnormal behaviours** include a reduced range of normal behaviours and also stereotypic behaviours. **Stereotypic behaviours** are those that are repetitive and serve no useful purpose e.g. circling, whirling, pacing, jumping, repetitive grooming or self-biting, compulsive staring and barking.

*Click on this [YouTube link](#) for a video of pacing and circling behaviours common in animals living in confinement.*

## What happens when there is no environmental enrichment?

Problems that incur in all dog kennels include:

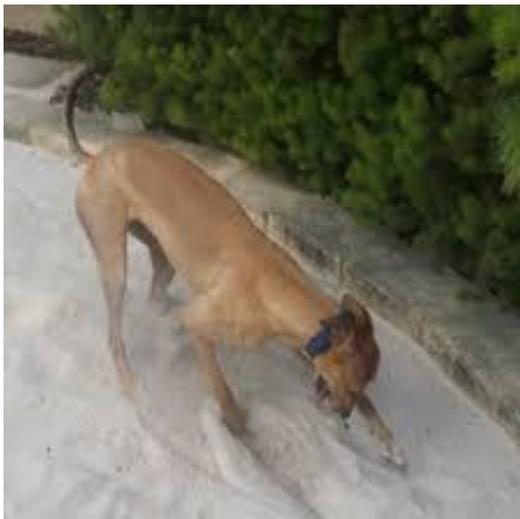
- chewing bedding, the cage or general destruction of the kennel;
- barking or howling;
- pacing or hyperactivity; and
- introverted behaviour such as sucking, licking and biting oneself (paws, wrists and flank areas are often the target).



Regardless of whether or not the kennel dog is bored or anxious, behavioural enrichment is required to keep the dog happy and healthy.

The size of an animal's cage/enclosure/pen/run is important but more important is what is in that environment. Items need to be added to the enclosure to increase variety and complexity and to allow the dog to exhibit normal canine behaviour.

## What can I use to enrich my greyhounds' environment?



### CAGE FURNITURE

Some dogs like to see what is going on outside. It may be necessary to provide the dog with a viewing platform that the dog can climb up onto, allowing the dog a view of the outside world. Dogs also like an enclosed kennel or den, a darkened area where they can spend some quiet time.

### SANDPIT OR DIGGING AREA

Some greyhounds like to dig so creating a designated digging area may help to prevent them destroying the rest of the garden! The digging area should be 1 metre square with sand added to the soil to make digging easier. Bury titbits, toys, bones and chews in the pit and let the dog find them.

### A PADDLING POOL

Some dogs love water. Fill a shallow moulded plastic pool (clams) with water. Make sure the dog can get out of the pool and that the water is only paddling depth.



## ITEMS FOR CHEWING

Chewing is a natural behaviour for dogs and a rewarding experience for them. It is important to provide dogs with safe items that they can chew. Rawhide, Jumbones™, pig's ears or trotters, and nylon chews can satisfy this need as well as assisting with dental hygiene.

### TOYS

Toys can be pulled, chewed, shaken, stalked, carried, thrown and guarded. There are a wide variety of commercial toys available. There is individual variation between dogs as to what becomes a favourite toy. The way toys are presented to dogs is important. If the same toys are available all of the time, then they become bored with them. It is best to rotate the toys on a daily basis. When the toys are not in use, they should be put away so that the dog can't play with them. That way they will be special when they reappear. Toys may also need human involvement to make them more interesting.

If your greyhounds are group-housed indoors, chews and toys can be hung from the ceiling by sprung chains. That way, they won't fight over these items and it stops them being monopolised by any one dog. Suspended items also make it easier to clean the kennel. They should be hung at a height that allows the dog to temporarily hold the chew while lying down. Suspended chews and toys also maintain interest due to their unpredictable movement.

## SOCIAL INTERACTION



Greyhounds are sociable animals. They enjoy being in harmonious groups or pairs. In a kennel situation this may not be possible but dogs should be in visual contact of other dogs.

Human contact is also important. This can include daily grooming, training, walking, stroking, playing and general exercise sessions. Regular grooming each day promotes mutual trust and affection and allows us to check the dog for signs of health, which shapes a calm contented dog.

Some greyhounds will often not play on their own; they need either another dog or the handler to stimulate play.

### MUSIC

Some trainers and rearers like to play music or keep the radio on for greyhounds housed in kennels. For some greyhounds this can be calming and this is shown in reduced barking and increased resting. Stick to classical or easy-listening over very loud heavy metal music!

### ODOUR

Aromatherapy may also work as some smells and odours, e.g. lavender and chamomile, have a calming effect and have been found to encourage behaviours associated with relaxation in dogs. On the flipside, 'stimulating' odours, such as peppermint, can increase the dog's activity.

## FOOD-BASED ENRICHMENT

Greyhounds can become bored or under stimulated if their food is simply placed in a bowl at meal times, which gets eaten in a few seconds!

The food dispenser (such as a treat ball, Bustercube® or even an old soft drink bottle) offers several advantages over conventional feeding methods:

1. The food is distributed over a longer period of time. A food dispenser filled with 30 pieces of kibble lasts about 30 minutes, whereas the same amount of food is consumed within 30 seconds to three minutes when the food is freely available. That means that the time spent foraging (looking for food) increases.
2. The food is not permanently available but instead is available randomly. This unpredictability may raise the vigilance of the animals.
3. Maintenance is easy and does not require any additional time. The food dispenser itself is given to the dog to play with and can be refilled any time.
4. Even small amounts of food delivered by the dispenser have a strong effect on the behaviour of the animals. This is important, because all enrichment activities related to food have to be incorporated into the feeding schedule. This is much easier when the amount of food needed for enrichment is low.

These toys are a simple and inexpensive way to help to enrich your greyhound's foraging experience and thus reduce boredom and monotony. Any food or drink enrichment that requires extra manipulation and prolongs consumption time is a good thing, thus providing mental stimulation.

### *What are some toys my greyhounds can use?*

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Here are three types of toys available that provide stimulating play and food-based enrichment.



**Treatball®**



**Bustercube®**



**Kong® Toy**

Available from most pet shops and some vet clinics, these toys are filled with dry food. The dog rolls the ball or knocks the cube around causing the food to be released.

Kongs® are primarily designed as a treat holder. Stuff the centre with the dog's favourite treats and it will keep the dog occupied for hours. You can try putting in peanut butter, then dry food - it sticks to the inside and lasts longer. In summer you can freeze the goodies inside the Kong®.

## ICE BLOCKS

These are good in summer. You can buy a kit, which contains the equipment to make the ice block or make your own.

To make your own:

1. Rinse out empty milk containers and open up the top.
2. Put in anything the dog may like e.g. peanut butter, dry food, canned food, pig's noses and ears, chew bones, raw vegetables, etc.
3. Fill with water up to three-quarters (a stock cube can be added for extra flavour).
4. Freeze overnight.
5. Tear off the top of the milk carton and give the frozen treat to the dog. It also makes a great cool-down treat after exercise.

## SUMMARY

- **Social contact, both with other dogs and humans, is most important.**
- **Toys, music, scents and cage furniture can all help to enhance a routine environment.**
- **Regular rotation of items is important to prevent your greyhound becoming bored with them.**
- **It is also important to remember that greyhounds vary in temperament and perhaps also in their housing requirements and ability to cope with a particular kennelling system.**