

Why Your Dog Needs Sleep

The Role of Deep Recovery in Mental Health and Behaviour

We often focus on providing our dogs with physical exercise, long walks, and mental stimulation. However, the true key to emotional balance, physical health, and overall mental well-being lies in something far simpler: **quality, restorative sleep**. It is not just about total hours—the ability to enter a deep recovery state is what truly matters.

HUMAN AVERAGE

7–8 hrs

Per 24-hour cycle

ADULT DOGS

12–14 hrs

Daily sleep requirement

PUPPIES & SENIORS

16–20 hrs

High recovery requirement

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE BRAIN DURING SLEEP?

A dog's sleep cycle includes REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep—where you may notice twitching paws or soft vocalisations. During deep restorative sleep, critical biological processes occur:

Memory Consolidation

The brain organises and processes experiences, daily learning, and training sessions from the day.

Emotional Regulation

The nervous system "cleanses" itself, processing accumulated environmental stress and daily impressions.

Cortisol Reduction

Stress hormone levels drop significantly, allowing the central nervous system to fully recover.

Physical Healing

Tissues repair, immune defenses strengthen, and vital growth hormones are released.

** When a dog fails to achieve deep sleep, their brain remains in a state of chronic hyper-vigilance, preventing real biological recovery.*

CHRONIC DEPRIVATION & VISUAL SYMPTOMS

The Dangers of Sleep Deprivation

- **Emotional Instability:** Increased anxiety, reactivity, and irritability.
- **Learning Difficulties:** Overstimulated brains cannot focus or process training.
- **Weakened Immunity:** Higher susceptibility to infections and inflammation.
- **Trigger Stacking:** Inability to recover from minor daily stressors.

Symptoms of an Overstimulated Dog

- **No "Off-Switch":** Pacing continuously or following you room-to-room.
- **Sudden Outbursts:** Excessive barking at noises or previously ignored triggers.
- **Destructive Mouthing:** Seeking outlets for accumulated frustration.
- **Shallow Sleeping:** Jumping up instantly at the slightest sound.

STEP-BY-STEP: HOW TO HELP YOUR DOG ACHIEVE RESTORATIVE SLEEP

STEP 1 Create a Safe "Sleep Zone" & Calm Environment

Place your dog's bed away from busy household pathways (avoid hallways, front doors, or noisy TVs). Choose a quiet, low-traffic corner where your dog doesn't feel compelled to guard or monitor the family.

Pheromone Diffusers

e.g., ADAPTIL (one of several available products on the market) sends reassuring signals to help lower baseline anxiety.

Soothing Soundscapes

Classical music or canine relaxation tracks mask unsettling external noises.

Compression Vests

e.g., ThunderShirt. Introduce gradually and under supervision—not all dogs comfortably accept touch or pressure on their body.

STEP 2 Implement the "Sacred Rest" Rule

Establish a strict household rule: **When the dog is sleeping, leave them completely alone.** Avoid touching, calling, or talking to a resting dog. They must feel 100% confident that their bed is an uninterrupted safe haven.

STEP 3 Manage Enrichment & Watch for Fixation

While snuffle mats and lick mats lower heart rates, high-drive or reactive dogs can become hyper-aroused or frustrated by puzzle toys.

- **Ration & Store Away:** Limit puzzle sessions to 5–10 minutes and remove items before frustration kicks in.
- **Decompression Walks:** Swap high-arousal fetch games for slow, relaxed walks on a long line in quiet areas, letting your dog sniff freely.

STEP 4 Reflect on Your Own Household Energy

Dogs are highly sensitive emotional mirrors. Often, an inability to settle reflects the energy level of the human environment. High-pitched talking, chaotic surroundings, or erratic reactions keep your dog in high arousal. Aim to be a predictable, calm anchor.

STEP 5 Establish Calming Routines & Mat Work

Create predictable daily patterns: after walks and meals, offer a low-arousal activity, dim the lights, and reduce noise. Practice **mat work** by rewarding calm behavior on their bed with low-value treats to teach that rest is the default state after activity.

Summary: Rest is a Biological Necessity

"Sleep is not a luxury—it is a fundamental biological and emotional necessity. By offering your dog the time, space, and environment for deep, uninterrupted sleep, you solve many behavioural challenges before they even begin."

Before planning your dog's next busy day, ask yourself: *Has my dog had enough deep sleep today?*