



Battling Boredom: Tips for Surviving Cage Rest

Exercise is a serious “no-no” when your dog is undergoing treatment for heartworm infection, so keeping your dog quiet and calm is essential. The following tips can help you navigate this challenging but crucial time period.

What does the treatment for heartworm infection involve?

After your dog has been diagnosed with heartworm infection, he will likely be given a series of different medications. One of these medications is an adulticide that kills the adult heartworms in your dog’s bloodstream. Your veterinarians will administer several injections of this medication over a period of a month. From the first injection until six to eight weeks following the last injection, it will be absolutely essential to keep your dog quiet. That means strictly restricting all exercise and activity that would elevate your dog’s heart rate or increase his blood pressure.

Why does my dog need to be kept quiet during heartworm treatment?

Killing the heartworms that live in the dog’s bloodstream is essential to restoring your dog’s health, but at the same time, the death of the worms—which can grow to be a foot long or longer—poses risks. When heartworms die, pieces of the decomposing worm bodies can block blood vessels in the lungs, causing a potentially fatal pulmonary embolism (blood clot). If the dog’s heart rate is increased by exercise or excitement, the worm pieces can be forced into the tiny blood vessels of the lungs, increasing the chances of complications.

How much do I need to restrict my dog’s exercise—and how do I keep him happy?

Keep your dog indoors and/or in a kennel most of the time. When he needs to go outside to relieve himself, keep his leash on, so that a sudden encounter with a squirrel or other distraction doesn’t send him running.

Here are several other tips to consider:

- **Give him companionship.** Social interaction is key to your dog’s behavioral health. Replace activity with affection by keeping him close to you while you watch TV or read. Avoid visitors of both the two-legged and four-legged variety.



You may also want to keep your dog away from windows if he’s prone to barking when he sees passersby.

- **Make mealtime last.** There’s no need for quick meals, so try feeding toys like Kongs or puzzle feeders that require your dog to quietly play for hours in order to extract food or treats.
- **Let him chew.** Dogs that are bored can be destructive to themselves or their environment. Long-lasting, safe chew toys can channel this behavior and help keep your confined dog happy.
- **Train the brain.** New tricks and games that keep your dog’s brain busy and body rested are perfect for eliminating boredom. Try a game of stationary catch or use a clicker to train him to follow quiet commands while he’s in his crate.

Keeping your treated dog calm and quiet is one of the most important responsibilities a pet owner has during heartworm treatment. Talk to your veterinarian about when increased activity can be reintroduced and take a gradual approach to resuming exercise and activity.

