Staying active is essential to both the physical and mental wellbeing of your pet. As a busy pet owner, ensuring your pet is getting enough exercise can sometimes fall by the wayside. Here are some fresh ideas on how to implement regular activity into your pet’s life. Please remember, there are many factors that should be considered when determining your pet’s optimal activity needs. Age, breed, size, and additional health considerations will all influence how much exercise your pet should be receiving each day. If you are ever unsure, consult with your veterinarian.

Exercise Ideas For Dogs
**Outdoor exercise ideas**

* **Walk around the block:** A simple stroll up and down your street is a great way to begin an exercise routine with your pet. Start with a brisk 5-minute walk twice a day to help get their legs moving and heartrate pumping and slowly begin to increase duration or even turn it into a light jog once the routine is solidified. Remember, building exercise into your pet’s day can be just as much a commitment for you as it is for them; having a regular daily walk schedule will help both of you stay on track!
* **Local dog park:** If your dog gets along well with others, a trip to your local dog park is a great exercise option. Your dog can run around with their puppy friends, burning off all the energy, while you have some time to relax on the sidelines. Many dog parks also have a separated area for smaller dogs to play away from the strength and speed of some of the larger breeds around.
* **Play fetch:** Playing fetch is a great way to help get your dog running outside. You can use a dog toy designed for throwing, or simply a tennis ball, soft frisbee, or even a large stick. It may take some trial and error at first to find out what your pet likes to chase best, but the game itself is very instinctual for many of our canine friends so try not to give up on them!
* **Agility course:** You don’t need special equipment to create a fun course for your pup. Simply pull out some big pots, a plastic step stool, balls, and their favorite toys. Spread the objects around your yard or at the park and get creative! Just make sure anything you use is free from sharp edges and sturdy enough to withstand some knocks.
* **Have a pet playdate:** If your pet has another furry friend they bond well with, set up a regular playdate for them both to have time running around together. Not only do they tire each other out, the opportunity to play with animals of their own species can help improve mental health and stimulation.
* **Running:** If you enjoy jogging around your neighborhood, try bringing your dog along. It may take a few runs for you both to sync up your strides, especially if your dog is unfit, but after a while your runs can become a very peaceful, exercise-filled bonding experience.
* **Take a hike:** During warmer, drier months of the year, taking your dog on weekend hikes can be very enjoyable and a great workout for both you and your pet. Just ensure the trail you are taking is dog friendly and keep an eye out for rattlesnakes and ticks along the way.
* **Swimming:** Swimming provides wonderful non-impact cardio exercise for pets, which is especially helpful for older pets with arthritis or other joint problems. Some options of places to take your dog swimming could include a local lake or pond, a friend’s pool.
* **Bring them on pet-friendly outings:** Are you meeting a friend at a pet-friendly coffee shop? Or do you need to stop by a store that allows our furry friends to join? Any time you can bring your pet out and about with you, you are adding extra steps to their daily movement and providing some essential socialization and mental engagement.

**Indoor exercise ideas**

Whether the weather is poor, your neighborhood is not very pet-friendly, or you have returned home from a long day and do not want to leave the house again – there are still plenty of options to give your dog a good workout from the comfort of your home!

* **Hide and seek:** Hide somewhere in your house and then call your dog’s name and wait for them to run around trying to find you! Depending on how good your pet is at hunting, you can tailor the difficulty of the spots you hide in and use bells or squeaker toys to increase their willingness to play.
* **Fetch:** Fetch doesn’t just have to be an outdoor game. Find an area of your house where there is a clear path to run and a soft toy to throw and you have a perfect setup for a faster game of fetch.
* **Tug-of-war:** Another very simple at-home game that helps your active pet burn some energy, tug of war just requires a strong, durable toy and some space to move around. Most dogs will instinctually try to pull their toy away from you and depending on their strength, you can simply just hold the toy and allow them to tug or pull it back a little. Just remember to stay mindful of their teeth – do not tug too hard on your end as this could hurt your dog’s mouth.
* **Doggie in the middle:** Encourage other members of your household to join in the games! Get your pets favorite toy and throw it back and forth with your roommate, partner, or kids. Occasionally drop the toy or throw it to the side so your pup can get it, helping them remain engaged in the game for longer.
* **Use a "flirt" pole**: Similar to cat wands, dog ‘flirt poles’ are simply a dog toy attached to a string. These allow you to dangle and swing the toy around, making your pup jump, run, and chase the toy. Flirt poles are best used on puppies and smaller dogs that don’t have the strength to break the toy and should always be used with supervision to prevent them trying to swallow the string.

Exercise Ideas For Cats
Although most cats don’t instinctively play games like fetch as our canine friends do, many cats will become enthralled with fun games that involve their drive to catch prey.

* **Cat wands** are a great option for helping to get your feline exercising as the way you can make the dangling toy quickly move and bounce will encourage your cat to jump and run.
* **Catch the light:** One of the most popular cat exercise hacks is the use of a laser pointer. Simply point the light at the floor near your cat, moving it around a little to initially catch their attention. Then begin moving it around faster, bouncing it from the walls and up onto couches. Cats instinctively will think it is a creature that they can catch and will burn a lot of energy. Just be mindful to never point the laser near their face – especially directly at the eyes.
* **Take them walking:** Did you know that many cats can actually be trained to take walks just like dogs?! Most pet stores and some vet clinics sell harnesses and leashes made specially for cats – just strap them in and go on an adventure together! It will take a little patience at first while your cat gets used to being on a leash but after some persistent training, many cats enjoy the freedom of exploring the outdoors. Please also ensure that your cat has received all the necessary vaccinations and preventatives to keep them safe before taking them outside. Let your veterinarian know you are wanting to walk your cat and they will provide all the essential protection your feline friend needs.
* **Hide and seek:** Pick out some healthy, low calorie treats that your cat enjoys and hide them in different places throughout the house. Place some up high on their cat tree or empty shelves and others buried in old blankets. Most cats have great senses of smell and will hunt down their tasty treats. The more difficult the location you place the treats in, the more your cat will have to work to seek out their reward.
* **Purchase a cat tower:** If you don’t have the space or time to create your own climbing playground for your cat, consider purchasing a 3 or 4 tier cat tower. These often come with additional elements of stimulation like hanging toys, scratching surfaces, and a place to retreat to.
* **Wear a 'tail':** A fun way to get your cat running around the house is to attach a thick rope or an old scarf to your own waste and allow it to drag along the floor. For added excitement, try to connect one of their toys that rattles or jingles. Many cats will try to ‘catch’ your tail and will be getting a good amount of exercise while chasing you around!
* **Find a feline friend:** As more independent animals, cats tend not to rely on their human companions for stimulation. Most cats, however, will play heavily when they are with their own kind. Try to schedule regular play dates with a friend’s cat or consider checking out SPCA to see if you can find your kitty a new furry sibling to run around with.

Additional tips for lazy cats

**Rotate their toys often.** Cats tend to get bored very easily, which can cause them to quickly lose interest in toys they were once enthralled by. To counteract this, have a stock of toys and only leave a few out for your cat to play with. Approximately every 2 weeks (depending on their unique attention span), swap out their toys for some you have been storing. Due to their short memory, your cat will think they are brand new toys and be energized to play with them again!

**Form a schedule.** Cats thrive on routine – their energy levels tend to fluctuate at similar times each day if their feeding and sleeping schedule is kept consistent. Find a good times when your cat seems more energetic and try to engage at the same time each day. Your cat will learn that this is play time and will be ready for some exercise once it is solidly built into their daily routine.

**Short but frequent playtimes.** As mentioned above, cats have very short attention spans and tend to release their energy in quick bursts throughout the day. If possible, try to form a play/exercise schedule for your cat that includes 5-10 minutes of intense play every few hours. This may not seem very feasible for working pet owners, but you could perhaps find someone to drop in while you’re gone for a few minutes to provide the activity your cat needs while you are gone.

**Be mindful of catnip:** Although catnip can be a great way to help motivate your cat to be more active and playful, not all cats respond well to its effects. Some cats may have reverse results with catnip and simply become zoned out and unengaged, while others may become violent.If you are considering using catnip to help increase your cat’s activity levels, first ask your veterinarian if it would be recommended based on your cat’s health status and the dosage that they would suggest. Start with a very small amount and introduce it to your cat when they can be closely monitored. If your cat responds well, you can increase to the recommended amount, but discontinue immediately if any adverse effects develop.