

Let's Sleep On It

Sleep is one of the most important components of health for dogs and humans. Sleep allows the body and brain to recover, process information, and be ready for the next day. Most adult dogs sleep an average of 12 and 14 hours daily. Puppies, senior dogs, and some large breeds may require significantly more rest.

Activity monitoring shows that most dogs have a morning active period, associated with activity before their owners go to work, followed by a longer activity period starting in the late afternoon and evening when owners return home. These activity periods account for roughly 20% of the day.

For the remainder of the day, 50% of time is spent sleeping and the remaining 30% is spent awake, but inactive, characterised by a light snooze.

During sleep, dogs cycle through different stages, including non-rapid eye movement (non-REM) sleep and rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. Signs that your dog is in REM sleep, a sleep phase associated with dreaming, may include:

- Breathing that is more rapid and shallow
- Eyes that are closed but showing quick movements
- Muscles that are twitching, legs that are moving
- Barking, whimpering, crying or other sounds

Unlike humans who spend approximately 25% of time in REM, restorative sleep, dogs only spend 10% of their sleeping time in REM cycles.

Inadequate sleep can affect a dog's ability to cope with daily stressors and may contribute to behavioural problems, irritability, or reduced ability to learn and retain new information.

Scientists believe that sleep is also important for memory



Sadie sleeping comfortably on her sofa

consolidation. Experiences and learning that occur during the day are processed during sleep, helping dogs retain training and develop long-term memories.

Owners can support healthy sleep by providing a comfortable sleeping area, ensuring sleeping areas at night are dark or dim, maintaining consistent daily routines, ensuring adequate exercise and mental enrichment, and minimising disruptions during rest periods. It's also easier for dogs to sleep if they aren't being interrupted by excessive noise; noise is often a problem in commercial daycare or kennel facilities due to the number of dogs kept in a confined area.

Some people use a crate or kennel to contain young puppies and encourage them to sleep. Whether you continue to crate your dog as they age or transition them to a dog bed, it's important that where they sleep offers both comfort and support. Older dogs or those with joint problems typically require a more supportive bed and one that is free from cold and draught.

Sudden changes in sleeping patterns or excessive lethargy should be discussed with a veterinarian.

Ultimately, quality sleep is not simply downtime for dogs - it is a critical biological process that supports physical recovery, mental health, learning, and overall quality of life. 

This column represents the author's reflections on her interaction with the dog world and does not necessarily reflect any official position of Dogs New Zealand.

References

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