

What Do Dogs Do All Day?

Owners' videotapes reveal the secret lives of dogs.

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After a long, hard day at work or school, nothing is nicer than coming home to your dog. Ecstatic to see you and behaving as if you've been away for decades, your dog lets you know daily how much it misses you. "My dog must be bored stiff!" you may think to yourself. "He must lie there all day doing nothing but thinking of me!"

Boredom indeed plays a role in what dogs do when alone, but they're not necessarily pining away, said Daniel Q. Estep, Ph.D., an animal behaviorist at Animal Behavior Associates in Littleton, Colo.

"If the environment is boring no street noise, no people walking by your dog will probably sleep more," he said.

On the other hand, no hard-and-fast rules apply to home-alone dogs, so there is really no way, short of spying, to know what your dog is up to when you're away. "Younger animals are more prone to be active than older animals ... but some dogs are a lot more reactive to environmental stimulation than others," Estep said. "It really depends on the dog. Some jump at every sound, and others need a cannon to get them moving."

So maybe your dog merely sleeps the long day away. Then again, why do items from the bathroom trash keep appearing mysteriously under your pillow? And didn't you make that bed before you left? And who washed the dirty dishes? And who forgot to put away the Lady and the Tramp video? And just what is that aroma did somebody order a pizza? Hmm. Maybe your dog actually has a life. A schedule. An agenda, even.

DOG FANCY asked two dog owners to videotape their dogs to see just what went on when they weren't home.

Our first video star is Yeshe, a 2-year-old Tibetan Terrier who lives with her devoted owner, Terry Mueller, in Chicago. Named after a figure from Tibetan Buddhism, Yeshe is a sweet, adaptable dog who loves to play and thrives on being the center of attention. She loves to be photographed and will bark in protest if Mueller tries to photograph anything else.

What does Yeshe do all day when her human companion is at work? "I know she doesn't just sleep because every morning I make the bed, and when I come home, it's always unmade," Mueller said. Since Yeshe and Mueller live alone, Mueller said she is unusually tuned in to what her dog has been up to during the day. "I hide treats around the house, then check to see which ones she's found when I get home. I notice everywhere she's been, everything that's been moved. I suspect she's very busy."