THE EFFECTS OF DIFFERENT SOCIAL ENRICHMENT METHODS ON HYPERACTIVITY IN SHELTER DOGS.

HO Hauser¹, A Protopopova², CDL Wynne².
¹Maddie’s Shelter Medicine Program, College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA. ²Department of Psychology, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA.

To maximize adoptions and reduce euthanasia it is highly important to modify shelter dogs’ behavior to appear attractive to potential adopters. This study tested two strategies currently implemented by shelters to reduce such hyperactive behaviors. Six dogs experienced a calm treatment, which aimed to create an association between people and relaxed activities to reduce in-kennel excitement. Calm treatment consisted of reading to the dog for 15 min with no interaction. Another set of six dogs received supplemental exercise, which aimed at releasing energy that may be causing the hyperactivity. Exercise treatment consisted of 15 min of toy play or light running with interaction encouraged.

Each dog received 2 wk of daily baseline assessment and 2 wk of a daily treatment in a counter-balanced within-subject design to determine if there was a change in hyperactive in-kennel behaviors. Hyperactivity was measured by videotaping each dog daily over 30 s before a treatment and 30 s after a treatment or 30 s each day during baseline. Rates of behaviors and barking frequency were analyzed in each video. Overall, there were no negative effects associated with either treatment. The barking frequency decreased significantly, as compared to baseline, before and after the calm treatment (F(1) = 6.3, p = .03 and F(1) = 6.3, p = 0.03 respectively). Jumping on the kennel door also decreased and locomotion increased after both treatments. However, these changes did not reach statistical significance. Therefore, social enrichment methods reduce hyperactivity in shelter dogs and can potentially increase adoptability.