



## What the Heck are Zoomies?

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There seems to be a witching hour or two per day where some dogs are suddenly possessed. They look as if they are being chased by ghost predators and are running for their lives. Some people have described their dog's behavior as aggressive and others utterly manic. Regardless of how you interpret these intense bursts of energy, the sequences generally look the same: dogs running around with their rumps tucked, their backs rounded, while rocketing around the house or running in circles. This is what is known as the Zoomies. It is also called a Frenetic Random Activity Period (FRAP.) These are intense explosions of energy that dogs can have – often morning and evening but it can be any time of day.

FRAPs occur as energy builds up and then is released in one big burst. It is most common in younger dogs, but it can occur following any stressful event where a dog experiences relief such as returning from the vet, following a bath, and after experiencing something fearful. It can even occur in response to being corrected or reprimanded. In these situations, dogs become almost euphoric in their relief following a stressor and it triggers a Zoomie episode.

Some owners worry that their dogs are behaving aggressively toward them when they try to physically intervene during a Zoomie episode. When in the middle of this outburst, a dog can direct that energy toward the person who either gets in the way or tries to stop the freight train. While this is a completely normal behavior, we will discuss ways to manage these outbursts and try to direct dogs toward more appropriate behavior.

So, when should you let Zoomies happen and when should you try to redirect your dog? For younger dogs, they have a biological need to expend this pent-up energy. The episodes often occur twice a day in conjunction with their natural circadian rhythm. This energy must be expended, and we should not attempt to stop it or control it. We can, however, anticipate it and redirect it. These rhythm related Zoomies often occur at predictable times or in predictable circumstances. The best strategy is to give the dog a safe and appropriate environment to expend this energy. Let your dog outside or clear a safe space indoors. It may be helpful to place a handful of toys down for your dog to target, pick up, and throw around. Giving your dog a safe place to direct this behavior is usually the best strategy. Luckily, Zoomies are like a shooting star, it is intense, but it burns out fast. It is best not to try to stop this behavior by getting in your dog's way, grabbing, yelling, etc. This will likely further stimulate your dog and prolong the episode. Try to provide an appropriate outlet for it to burn out more quickly.

Zoomies that are an after effect of conflict are sometimes a little easier to control. The "after a bath" Zoomies are usually quick and a helpful aid for the drying process! For these Zoomies, you

will want to keep your dog inside or away from dirt and mud which will ruin all your efforts. The Zoomies emanating from “euphoric relief” are best handled by managing triggers and anticipating outcomes. If your dog has experienced a stressful event such as working through fear of something novel, it is best to guide that behavior. You can jolly your dog but try to keep him somewhat controlled by keeping a leash on him. Dogs often like to “shake off” a stressful event literally by engaging in a wet dog shake. Let him shake it off and then guide him onto another activity which can include controlled play with a toy, a quick repetition of easy training commands, a short brisk walk, or a nice roll all over the floor. It is best not to allow these situations to become too manic because dogs need to learn to process conflict and have controlled recoveries. Conflict can occur any place any time, so it is best for your dog to learn to process these events with a modicum of impulse control.

Is it possible that a dog’s Zoomie-like behavior could be a problem? Zoomies, as we have discussed, are considered FRAPs. That is, they are random bursts of intense but brief energy. They are biologically necessary but not harmful. With some dogs, their patterns are better characterized as manic behavior. This is usually more of a personality trait than it is a random behavior state. Manic behavior is characterized by a sustained period of an abnormally elevated or irritable mood, intense energy, a racing mind, and other extreme and exaggerated behaviors. These manic behavior episodes are often frequent in their occurrence and sometimes, people or a particular family member becomes a target for uncontrolled jumping, mouthing, biting, etc. Mania causes unreasonable euphoria and is more closely linked to anxiety than it is happiness. Euphoria causes dopamine to be released. Unreasonable or sustained euphoria is linked to too much dopamine concentrated in some parts of the brain and not enough in other parts. This is linked to more competitive and aggressive behaviors and having poor impulse control.

If you have concerns that your dog may be experiencing frequent manic episodes, you should contact a veterinary behaviorist to have your dog evaluated for hyperkinesia which is the canine form of ADHD.

Zoomies are neither an expression of happiness nor of anxiety. It is merely a biological state where energy that has been pent-up must be released. The best way to balance this is through consistent training and appropriate exercise. Zoomies are best handled through appropriate redirection in order to balance the dog’s energy.