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It's strange how a stray scent can blindside you.

A whiff of Old Spice and you're five again, sitting on your grandfather's knee. Sniff a particular perfume and you remember a lover from 20 years ago or that friend of your mother's with the funny laugh.

## **Scent is a irresistible memory trigger**

Now consider your dog. Her sense of smell is 40 times more powerful than yours. A stroll down the sidewalk and she's in a completely different world. You smell "something sour." She's sailing through roiling clouds of invisible odors, her wet nose twitching, reading whole story lines and catching up on the neighborhood news.

And you wonder why she won't just step it *up* and get on with her walk.

We're alike in so many ways, our dogs and us, but smell sets us apart. For people, vision is the primary sense. A *third* of your dog's brain is devoted to detecting, identifying and filing smells away. Their nose is an incredible scent-gathering organ. And it's directly linked to the portions of their brain that govern memory, emotion and pleasure.

In short, your dog lives to smell.

Luckily for you, your dog is likely to forgive you for tugging on that leash when their nose is buried in the bushes. The scent of you lights up their pleasure centers. To your dog, you smell like a fine perfume.

## **How keen is their nose?**

A dog can detect scents diluted to one or two parts per trillion. They can smell an object buried 40 feet underground. They can detect a corpse 80 feet down under water. A drug dog once alerted on 35 pounds of pot in a plastic container submerged in a vehicle's gas tank. Dogs can smell whale poop a mile from the

sea.

Your dog can smell bacteria. She can detect diseases like cancer and diabetes. She can smell bed bugs. A dog's nose can find tunnels, weapons and booby traps. She can locate minerals and ores.

### **Dogs can *smell* feelings**

It gets better. Dogs have an organ we do not, Jacobson's organ, which is located in their bottom of their nasal passage. They can detect pheromones and hormones. So, dogs can smell fear, anxiety, sadness, anger and stress. You can't fool your dog by putting on a happy face.

When your dog rears back his head and pulls up his upper lip, he's throwing more scent across his Jacobson's organ to get a better read on the situation. You thought they were reading your mind. No, they were *smelling* it. Scary, isn't it?

### **Let them do their scent work**

When I take Oisin, my year-old Irish wolfhound, on his daily walks, I have to restrain myself. He needs the exercise just like I do and we have a lot of ground to cover. But now that he's maturing, he's turned into a regular bloodhound. Oisin wants to smell every blade of grass, every bush, every hydrant and lamp post, and when we're done with all that, he's often pulled by his nose back in the other direction for a second pass. He's transfixed by things I can't see or sense.

I let him do his scent work. I understand that his brain is becoming a vast filing cabinet of scents. When he's stuck by his

nose to a spot of sidewalk, I know he's analyzing a particularly striking scent, cross-referencing it with known specimens, annotating it and filing it away for later.

He's also getting a lot of pleasure out of it. He's using his super power. He was born to do it. So I study the clouds....