



## *How to Manage or Reduce Your Dog's Destructive Chewing*

### **Normal Chewing Behavior**

Chewing is a perfectly normal behavior for dogs of all ages. Both wild and domestic dogs spend hours chewing bones. This activity keeps their jaws strong and their teeth clean. Dogs love to chew on bones, sticks and just about anything else available. They chew for fun, they chew for stimulation, and they chew to relieve anxiety. While chewing behavior is normal, dogs sometimes direct their chewing behavior toward inappropriate items. Both puppies and adult dogs should have a variety of appropriate and attractive chew toys. However, just providing the right things to chew isn't enough to prevent inappropriate chewing. Dogs need to learn what is okay to chew and what is not. They need to be taught in a gentle, humane manner.

### ***Useful Tips***

- “Dog-proof” your house. Put valuable objects away until you're confident that your dog's chewing behavior is restricted to appropriate items. Keep shoes and clothing in a closed closet, dirty laundry in a hamper and books on shelves. Make it easy for your dog to succeed.
- Provide your dog with plenty of his own toys and inedible chew bones. Pay attention to the types of toys that keep him chewing for long periods of time and continue to offer those. It's ideal to introduce something new or rotate your dog's chew toys every couple of days so that he doesn't get bored with the same old toys. (Use caution: Only give your dog natural bones that are sold specifically for chewing. Do not give him cooked bones, like leftover t-bones or chicken wings, as these can splinter and seriously injure your dog. Also keep in mind that some intense chewers may be able to chip small pieces off of natural bones or chip their own teeth while chewing. If you have concerns about what's safe to give your dog, speak with his veterinarian.)
- Offer your dog some edible things to chew, like bully sticks, pig ears, rawhide bones, pig skin rolls or other natural chews. Dogs can sometimes choke on edible chews, especially if they bite off and swallow large hunks. If your dog is inclined to do this, make sure he's separated from other dogs when he chews so he can relax. (If he has to chew in the presence of other dogs, he might feel that he has to compete with them and try to quickly gulp down edible items.) Also be sure to keep an eye on your dog whenever he's working on an edible chew so that you can intervene if he starts to choke.
- Identify times of the day when your dog is most likely to chew and give him a puzzle toy filled with something delicious. You can include some of your dog's daily ration of food in the toy.
- Do your best to supervise your dog during all waking hours until you feel confident that his chewing behavior is under control. If you see him licking or chewing an item he shouldn't, remove the item from your dog's mouth, and insert something that he CAN chew. Then praise him happily.





- When you can't supervise your dog, you must find a way to prevent him from chewing on inappropriate things in your absence. For example, if you work during the day, you can leave your dog at home in a confinement area for up to six hours. Use a crate or put your dog in a small room with the door or a baby gate closed. Be sure to remove all things that your dog shouldn't chew from his confinement area, and give him a variety of appropriate toys and chew things to enjoy instead. Keep in mind that if you confine your dog, you'll need to give him plenty of exercise and quality time with you when he's not confined.
- Provide your dog with plenty of physical exercise (playtime with you and with other dogs) and mental stimulation (training, social visits, etc.). If you have to leave your dog alone for more than a short period of time, make sure he gets out for a good play session beforehand.
- To help your dog learn the difference between things he should and shouldn't chew, it's important to avoid confusing him by offering unwanted household items, like old shoes and discarded cushions. It isn't fair to expect your dog to learn that some shoes are okay to chew and others aren't.

#### **Lack of Exercise or Mental Stimulation**

Some dogs simply do not get enough physical and mental stimulation. Bored dogs tend to look for ways to entertain themselves, and chewing is one option. To prevent destructive chewing, be sure to provide plenty of ways for your dog to exercise his mind and body. Great ways to accomplish this include daily walks and outings, off-leash play with other dogs, tug and fetch games, clicker training classes, dog sports (agility, freestyle, flyball, etc.), and feeding meals in food puzzle toys.

#### **Stress and Frustration**

Sometimes a dog will chew when experiencing something that causes stress, such as being crated near another animal he doesn't get along with or getting teased by children when confined in a car. To reduce this kind of chewing, try to avoid exposing your dog to situations that make him nervous or upset.

Dogs who are prevented from engaging in exciting activities sometimes direct biting, shaking, tearing and chewing at nearby objects. A dog who sees a squirrel or cat run by and wants to chase but is behind a fence might grab and chew at the gate. A dog watching another dog in a training class might become so excited by the sight of his canine classmate having fun that he grabs and chews his leash. The best intervention for this problem is to anticipate when frustration might happen and give your dog an appropriate toy for shaking and tearing.

#### **What NOT to Do**

- Do not show your dog the damage he did and spank, scold or punish him after the fact. He cannot connect your punishment with some behavior he did hours or even minutes ago.
- Do not use duct tape to hold your dog's mouth closed around a chewed object for any length of time. This is inhumane, will teach your dog nothing, and dogs have died from this procedure.





- Do not tie a damaged object to your dog. This is inhumane and will teach your dog nothing.
- Do not leave your dog in a crate for lengthy periods of time (more than six hours) to prevent chewing.
- Do not muzzle your dog to prevent chewing.

Source: <https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/dog-care/common-dog-behavior-issues/destructive-chewing>

