
CHEW TRAINING

Why dogs chew.

Biologists tell us chewing is all about toning jaw muscles. Dogs no longer need to split bones and grind down marrow to survive, but the urge is hardwired into them. And into some more than others. Some dogs live to chew; others can take it or leave it. How often dogs chew and what they chew also fall under individual taste.

What is certain is that chewing is normal and healthy, not a behavior problem. But it can still be a regular problem—for you and your furniture.

It's not a phase.

Puppies do chew more, yes. But chewing isn't like teething in babies; it won't peter out and eventually stop. All dogs chew some and some dogs chew a lot. Whether you have a puppy or a newly adopted grown dog, give him plenty of allowed things to chew right away to get him hooked on those instead of your shoes.

The things dogs chew.

Edibles: Chew bones, pigs' ears, bully sticks, greenies, etc.

Non-Edibles: Rubber balls, Nylabones, Kongs (without food), etc.

Dissectible Things: Plush toys, rope toys, Hide-A-Bee (Squirrel, Bird) etc.

Puzzle Toys: Stuffed Kong, stuffed marrowbone, tricky treat balls, etc.

Experiment to find out what your dog prefers. Always have a mixed selection at hand and rotate different types of chewies to keep your dog interested. For aggressive chewers, consider durable rubber chews like Kongs vs. extremely hard chews like bones or antlers to prevent fractured teeth or other mouth injuries. For dogs who swallow fabric/toy pieces, avoid giving them dissectible toys that could cause a blockage. Supervise your dog with any new chew until you know how they do with them.

The training part.

Step 1. Prevent mistakes. When you can't supervise, put your puppy or dog in an enclosed, dog-proofed area with a sanctioned chewie.

Step 2. Teach good chewing choices. Audition a range of chewies until you find the ones that most appeal to your dog. Dogs have texture preferences, so try to match what yours like. If he is attacking the couch pillows, try

giving him plush toys (provided he doesn't eat the toy after destroying it). If he is eyeing the table leg, try a bone. Praise liberally when your dog chews something allowed.

Step 3. Interrupt mistakes. If your dog chews the wrong thing, interrupt and trade him for something he can chew on. Praise liberally when he does.

Step 4. Repeat if needed. If mistakes happen a lot, revisit step 1. Go back to using an enclosed, dog-proofed area until your dog is consistently making better chewing choices. Put away commonly chewed items like shoes to prevent repeated mistakes.

Training Tip:

Rotate different types of chewies to keep your dog interested.

Troubleshooting:

Is your dog suddenly chewing a lot? Is this a new habit? Make sure he is getting enough exercise daily and has access to things that are okay to chew. Additionally, feeding your dog through food puzzles, like a stuffed Kong or Toppl by West Paw, can satisfy their natural chewing urge while providing enrichment too.