

# Destructive Chewing

Puppies and dogs naturally chew on objects as they explore the world. For young dogs, chewing is a way to relieve pain caused by incoming teeth. For older dogs, it's nature's way of keeping jaws strong and teeth clean. Chewing also alleviates boredom and mild anxiety or frustration.

## Issues to Consider

### Separation Anxiety

Dogs who chew to relieve the stress of separation anxiety usually only chew when left alone or chew most intensely when left alone. They also show other signs of separation anxiety, such as whining, barking, pacing, restlessness, urination and defecation when left alone and just prior to being left alone. Ask for more info about separation anxiety and how to treat it.

### Fabric Sucking

Some dogs lick, suck and chew fabrics. Some experts believe that being weaned too early (before seven or eight weeks of age) can cause this behavior. If a dog's fabric-sucking behavior occurs for lengthy periods and it's difficult to distract him when he does it, it's possible it's a compulsive behavior. For more information, please ask to speak with our Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist.

### Hunger

A dog on a restricted diet might chew and destroy objects to find more sources of nutrition. Dogs usually direct this kind of chewing toward objects that smell like food or are related to food.

## How to Manage or Reduce Destructive Chewing

### Puppy Teething

Both the desire to investigate interesting objects and the discomfort of teething motivate puppies to chew. Like human infants, puppies go through a stage when they lose their baby teeth and experience pain as their adult teeth come in. This intensified chewing phase ends by about 7 months of age. You can give puppies ice cubes, freeze-able dog toys, or frozen wet washcloths to chew, which can help numb teething pain. You should also provide gentle guidance to teach your puppy to chew appropriate objects, like his own toys. See below for tips.

## Normal Chewing Behavior

Chewing is a perfectly normal behavior for dogs of all ages. Both wild and domestic dogs spend hours chewing bones. Chewing 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 chew inappropriate items. Both puppies and adult dogs should have a variety of appropriate, 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. And they need to be taught in a gentle, humane manner, not through pain, fear or intimidation, which impede learning.

## Useful Tips

- “Dog-proof” your house. Put valuable objects away until you’re confident that your dog’s chewing behavior is limited to her toys. Keep shoes and clothing in a closed closet, dirty laundry in a hamper and books on shelves. Set your dog up for success!
- Provide your dog with plenty of her own toys and chew bones. Pay attention to the types of toys that keep her chewing for long periods and continue to offer those. Try introducing something new or rotate your dog’s chew toys every couple of days so that she doesn’t get bored with the same old toys.
- Give your dog a “single serving” chew bone once or twice a day, something that she’ll finish in one sitting, like a bully stick or Dentabone. Dogs can sometimes choke on edible chew items, especially if they bite off and swallow large chunks. If your dog does this, make sure she’s separated from other dogs so she can relax while chewing. Also be sure to keep an eye on your dog when so you can intervene if she starts to choke.
- At times of day when your dog tends to chew, give her a puzzle toy, like a KONG or Kibble Nibble, filled with delicious food or some of your dog’s daily ration.
- You can also discourage chewing inappropriate items by spraying them with taste deterrents. When you first use a deterrent, apply a small amount to a tissue or piece of wool. Gently place it directly in your dog’s mouth. Allow him to taste it and then spit it out. If your dog finds the taste unpleasant, he might shake his head, drool or retch, and he won’t pick up the tissue or wool again. Ideally, he’ll want to avoid chewing items that smell like the deterrent. Spray it on all objects you don’t want your dog to chew. Reapply it every day for two to four weeks. Some common deterrents are Grannick’s Bitter Apple, Veterinarian’s Best Bitter Cherry Spray, Bitter YUCK! No Chew Spray and Chew Guard Spray. Note that successful treatment for destructive chewing requires more than just using deterrents. Dogs need to learn what they *can* chew as well as what they can’t.
- Supervise or crate/confine 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, ask him to "drop it," offer a piece of food or another item to chew, and trade him.

- When you can't supervise your dog, prevent destructive chewing by confining or crating him. You can put him in a confined area for up to 5 hours when you're gone, like a small room with a door or baby gate closed. Be sure to remove everything your dog shouldn't chew, and give him a variety of toys and chews to enjoy instead. Keep in mind that if you confine your dog, he'll need plenty of exercise (playtime with you and other dogs), mental stimulation (training, socializing) and quality time with you when he's not confined.
- Avoid confusing your dog by offering household items to chew, like old shoes and discarded cushions. It hard for dogs to learn that some shoes are okay to chew and others aren't.
- Some young dogs like to chew dirty clothes, so put laundry in a closed hamper. Others like to raid the garbage. This can be dangerous. Discard bathroom waste in a container that's inaccessible to your dog. Most dogs grow out of these behaviors as they mature.

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

Some dogs simply do not get enough physical and mental exercise. Bored dogs tend look for ways to entertain themselves. To prevent destructive chewing, provide plenty of activities for your dog to exercise his mind and body: daily walks and outings, off-leash play with other dogs, tug & fetch games, clicker training classes, dog sports (agility, freestyle, flyball), and feeding meals in food puzzle toys, like the KONG, Atomic Ball, TreatStik, or Kong Wobbler.

## **Stress and Frustration**

Sometimes a dog will chew when feeling stressed or anxious, 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, avoid situations that make him nervous or upset. Dogs who are prevented from joining exciting activities sometimes direct biting, shaking, tearing and chewing at nearby objects. Shelter dogs and puppies sometimes grab and shake blankets or bowls in their kennels

whenever people walk by because they'd like attention. When they don't get it, their frustration is expressed through destructive behavior. 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. (Agility and Flyball dogs are especially prone to this behavior because they watch other dogs racing around and having a great time, and they want to join in the action.) The best intervention is to anticipate when frustration might happen and give your dog a toy for shaking and tearing. In a class situation, carry a tug or stuffed toy for your dog to hold and chew. If your dog is frustrated

by animals or objects on the other side of a fence or gate at home, tie a rope toy to something sturdy by the gate or barrier.

## **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 will teach your dog nothing, and dogs have died from this inhumane procedure.
- Do not tie a damaged object to your dog. This is inhumane and won't teach your dog anything.
- Do not leave your dog in a crate for lengthy periods of time (more than 5 hours) to prevent chewing.
- Do not muzzle your dog to prevent chewing.