

Chewing

Chewing is a relatively common issue in dogs, especially puppies. It's normal for puppies and dogs to chew on objects as they explore the world. Chewing accomplishes a number of things for a dog. For young dogs, it's a way to relieve pain that might be caused by incoming teeth. For older dogs, it's nature's way of keeping jaws strong and teeth clean. Chewing also helps with boredom and can relieve mild anxiety.

Until your dog has learned what he can and can't chew, however, it's your responsibility to manage the situation as much as possible, so he doesn't have the opportunity to chew on unacceptable objects.

Causes

- *Puppy Teething*

Puppies, like toddlers, explore the world by putting objects in their mouths. And, like babies, they teethe for about six months, which usually creates some discomfort. Chewing not only facilitates teething but also makes sore gums feel better. Some recommend giving puppies ice cubes, special dog toys that can be frozen or frozen wet washcloths to chew, which might help numb teething pain. The main thing is to make sure that you are giving them appropriate alternatives to chew on.

- *Boredom*

Most destructive behavior is due to boredom in your dog. A lack of exercise and mental stimulation can lead to your dog finding his own ways to keep himself entertained. To help with this, make sure your dog is getting enough one on one time with you playing and working on basic manners. When you aren't supervising your dog, give him something positive to do like a chew bone or a food dispensing toy that can keep him busy for a while.

- *Anxiety*

Chewing can also be related to anxiety in your dog. This can be general anxiety or more specifically, separation anxiety when you leave the house. To better understand why your dog chews, you can set up a video camera when you leave the house. Watching it back will allow you to identify the true cause of the chewing. If your dog is pacing, whining, drooling, etc – the chewing or destructive behavior is more likely separation anxiety. (see *Separation Anxiety handout*)

Tips

- Take responsibility for your belongings and “dog proof” your house! Put valuable objects away, keep shoes and other items in a closed closet, and other items on shelves away and out of your dog’s reach. If you don’t want it in your dog’s mouth, don’t make it available.

Make it easy for him to succeed.

- Give your dog toys that are easily distinguishable from household good. Don’t confuse him by giving him an old sock to chew on.
- Supervise! You have to keep an eye on your dog until he learns the house rules. When you leave the house, your dog should be crated or in a safe, dog proofed area to keep him from getting into things as well. (*See Crate Training handout*)
- Make sure your dog is getting enough physical and mental exercise. A tired dog is a good dog! Identify what times your dog usually chews and give him a dog puzzle or play a game with him instead to replace the behavior with something constructive.
- In addition to all of the above, you can also try taste deterrents like Bitter Apple spray. This shouldn’t be used to replace teaching your dog appropriate chew manners. Spraying this on your furniture and other items can help make them much less appealing to your dog.

Note: Some dogs actually like the taste of taste deterrent, so it is not a cure all.

- Offer your dog a toy or treat instead of what he has in his mouth. If you need to get him to drop something, make sure to trade him with something else. Also, don’t chase your dog.

This will most likely lead to your dog playing keep away.

- Have realistic expectations. Eventually, your dog will chew up something – this is part of the transition. Be patient and don’t scold your dog if you find something chewed up.
- If you catch your dog in the act of chewing, clap your hands or say “aghh aghh” to get his attention and call him away from the item. Then provide him with an alternative and praise him. This is teaching him what is acceptable.