

Chewing

Chewing is a relatively common behavior in dogs, especially puppies. It's normal for dogs to chew on objects to explore their environment, for self-care, whether that's relieving pain caused by incoming teeth or to keep jaws strong and teeth clean, or they might do it for entertainment. Chewing helps alleviate boredom and treat mild anxiety or frustration. These are all healthy causes of chewing but as companion pets this means that our dogs need to learn what objects are and aren't appropriate to chew by our own standards. It's our job as pet owners to responsibly manage the behavior so that they don't have the opportunity to chew on unacceptable objects.

Causes

- **Teething:** puppies, like toddlers, explore the world by putting objects in their mouths. They teethe for about six months, which usually creates some discomfort. Some recommend giving puppies ice cubes, special dog toys that can be frozen to chew, which might help numb teething pain. It's important to make sure that you are giving them appropriate alternatives and a variety of textures to choose from.
- **Boredom:** most destructive behavior is due to boredom. A lack of exercise and mental stimulation can lead to many unwanted habits, including chewing. Make sure your dog is getting enough one on one time with you playing and working on basic manners. When you are unable to supervise your dog, be sure to give them something positive to do like a chew bone or food dispensing toy.
- **Anxiety:** whether it's general anxiety or more specifically, separation anxiety, it's important to understand why your dog chews. If your dog is pacing, whining, drooling, etc. the chewing or destructive behavior may be separation anxiety. Practice confidence building exercises and work with your dog on healthy alone time.

Tips:

- Take responsibility for your belongings and “dog proof” your house! Put valuable objects away, keep shoes away in closets, and other items on shelves out of reach. If you don’t want it in your dog’s mouth, don’t make it available.
- Set your dog up for success by giving them toys that are easily distinguishable from household items. Don’t confuse them by allowing them to chew on old socks or other disposed belongings.
- Supervise! 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 avoid opportunities for them to make mistakes.
- 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 interrupt them when they are in the act to give them an appropriate chewable toy, dog puzzle or play a game with them to replace the behavior with something constructive.
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. Do not chase your dog. This will most likely lead to your dog playing keep away.
- You can also try taste deterrents like Bitter Apple spray. This shouldn’t be used to replace teaching your dog appropriate chew manners but 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 deterrence, so it is not a cure all.
- Have realistic expectations! Your dog may very well chew up something to your disliking – 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.

Good luck and happy wags from the AAA team!