

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



CHEWING AND HOW TO SURVIVE IT



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

Why do dogs chew?

- **Puppy teething** – from three to seven months of age. Puppies have an uncontrollable urge to chew things to relieve the discomfort in their gums. Chewing facilitates the removal of puppy teeth and the eruption of the adult set.



- **Adolescent chewing** – occurs in dogs between puppyhood and adulthood at seven to 12 months of age. It can last for up to six months. This kind of chewing relieves gum discomfort as the adult teeth settle into the jawbone. A young dog may also chew in an attempt to find out more about its environment.

- **Boredom and attention seeking.** Dogs that are left alone for long periods or receive inadequate mental and physical stimulation are likely to become bored and start chewing things. Your dog may also realise that chewing something it shouldn't is a great way to get your attention.

- **An unbalanced diet.** If a dog does not have enough calcium in its diet, for example, it may try to compensate by chewing stones or plaster.

What can be done about chewing?

- Supply your dog with items that are safe and tough enough to survive being chewed. They should not splinter or break into pieces that can be swallowed.
- Ensure your dog has regular exercise away from home at least once a day. Visit different environments whenever you can, such as pavements, fields, woods, parks and beaches.
- Teach your dog what kinds of things are acceptable and unacceptable to chew
- Play with your dog. Short, frequent sessions are best – at least three times a day for at least five minutes.

Toys are different from chews

Toys and chews should not be confused. Toys are designed to be thrown, chased, squeaked and tugged during play. Most are not designed to be chewed. Chews are designed for nibbling and gnawing and are essential if you want your dog to chew acceptable items instead of your furniture. They should be given when your dog is settling down for a quiet time, either in your presence or on its own.

Chews

Ideally buy a wide range of chews, so that you can rotate the ones you give to your dog on a daily basis. Examples include rawhide, smoked bone, deep-fried marrowbone, rask, Nylabone and sterilised marrowbone.

Toys

Suitable toys for your dog include a squeaky ball, rubber ring, teddy, ball on a rope and a frisbee. They should not be left down for your dog to chew once the game has finished. This will ensure the toys last longer and, more importantly, that you won't have to take your dog to the vet because it has a blockage caused by swallowing toys or their component parts.

Special toys

Kongs

All dogs like to play on their own sometimes, so it is important to leave at least one 'safe' toy down for them to play with at any time. An excellent toy for this purpose is a 'Kong' (available from pet shops). A Kong is firm rubber toy that is hollow on the inside and can withstand lots and lots of chewing. If you stuff biscuits inside the Kong or smear some cheese spread inside, your dog will then work to get the food out and it will nibble, lick and chew on the toy for some time. Kongs are also very good at stimulating play and chase behaviour, since they bounce unpredictably in different directions when they have been thrown.

Activity ball

This is a hollow, dimpled ball the size of a small football, with two holes bored into it. If you place small pieces of dry food inside (for example a portion of your dog's daily ration) it will have to roll the ball around to get the food to drop out of the holes, which keeps it occupied for a long time.



Teach right from wrong

Reward your dog for chewing the right things

Every day, provide your dog with one or two chews that it has not seen for a while. When you see your dog settle down to chew one, praise it gently.

Correct your dog when it chews the wrong things

If you notice your dog about to chew something it shouldn't direct a short jet of water from a small water pistol or plant sprayer and wet it on the back of its head. Your intention should be to startle your dog, not to hurt or frighten it.

If your dog looks in your direction, pretend the water spray had nothing to do with you. After a few minutes, direct your dog's attention onto an acceptable chew and praise it when it begins to chew. The aim is for your dog to think that the correction came from somewhere in the environment, as a result of it chewing a particular object. Correcting your dog in this way is much better than telling it off and will mean that it will be less likely to chew unacceptable items when left alone.

Getting the timing right

The correction (water spray) will be most effective if it happens just as your dog is about to chew the object for the first time. If the correction occurs after it has already been chewing for a while, it will be too late.

If you are too late, then distract your dog by calling its name excitedly or picking up its lead. Praise it when it comes to you and give it a titbit. Then watch carefully – your dog will probably go back to its new hobby, giving you a chance to correct it before it starts to chew again.



Beyond adolescence and into adulthood

When your dog is a fully-grown adult, its desire to chew will be reduced, but it will not go completely. It is important to continue to give an adult dog chews and bones throughout its life to exercise its jaws and to keep its teeth clean.

Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk, the national pet care information service. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is provided by The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity. We rely entirely on your support to enable us to continue our vital work. Any contribution would be most welcome. Thank you.



All About Pets, The Blue Cross
FREEPOST NAT4336, BURFORD OX18 4BR
www.allaboutpets.org.uk

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