



Chewing

Dogs chew. It is a completely natural behavior for a dog, no more abnormal than laughing when you are tickled. Chewing is an instinctive way for a puppy to explore its new world. For adult dogs, it is a way to keep a dog's teeth healthy and strong, a great way to combat boredom and can help ease anxiety and frustration.

It is both virtually impossible to completely stop a dog from chewing and incredibly unfair to attempt to do so. You must provide appropriate chewing options for your dog, or the dog WILL make their own choices. When left to their own devices, dogs frequently choose things that we humans deem inappropriate such as shoes, cords, furniture, or the wall. Your job is to help your dog understand what is theirs to chew and what is not.

When working to reduce inappropriate chewing, it is best to take a multifaceted approach.

- Environmental Management
- Establish Preferences
- Canine Enrichment

Begin with environmental management. Your goal may be to allow your dog free roam of the house in your absence. Dogs can absolutely learn how to choose the correct objects to chew as they mature, if they are set up for success. If your dog is continuously successful at chewing inappropriate objects, they will continue to practice the behavior. Inappropriate chewing will not go away, even with age and maturity. Remember, any behavior reinforced will be repeated. Chewing feels good to your dog. It's fun to rip something into little bitty pieces, People often do the same thing with a straw wrapper or a napkin while waiting at a restaurant. You are not in charge of the reinforcement in this scenario, the dog is. So, you must ensure that the environment ceases all reinforcement.

Part of owning a dog is ensuring that they have a safe space to call their own. Good environmental management can mean different things for different dogs. For many, a kennel is a fantastic idea. Having a crate that your dog feels safe and comfortable in is a great way to ensure that they are not eating the sofa. It is important that you correctly condition your dog to their kennel. Ask your trainer for more information on this process. If kennel training is not an option, baby gates and other barriers can be very beneficial. It is important that you manage the dog's access to inappropriate objects.



Leaving a dog outside all day while you are away can also quickly become a recipe for disaster. Landscaping, air conditioners, sprinkler systems, fences, and your home itself can become a target of destructive chewing. Even with appropriate toys left outside with the dog, there are too many viable options and too much fun to be had. Obviously, every situation is unique, but you want to work towards the safest outcome for your dog. Typically, being left outside for an extended period is not the best idea, not only for chewing but because it can lead to other undesired behaviors like digging, barking and escaping.

Supervision is one of the most challenging aspects in preventing destructive chewing. When your dog is not confined, you must be actively paying attention to what your dog is doing. You cannot redirect a dog who is beginning to make a poor choice if you do not see it happen. You are left with dealing with the aftermath, which unfortunately means that the teaching opportunity has passed, and your dog has been given the opportunity to practice chewing. Being reactive to “destructive” chewing often means scolding or punishing your dog, which isn’t effective. This just teaches your dog to fear you and to avoid being caught. Consistency is key to deter inappropriate chewing habits. And remember, once a behavior has become a habit, it is much more difficult to stop. If your dog loves to eat socks, you must ensure that the socks are not accessible! If a sock is left on the floor and your dog loves socks, guess what they are going to chew. You need to prevent your dog from practicing the undesirable behavior.

It helps if you establish your dog’s Preferences: Not all dogs like to chew on the same things. Some dogs prefer stuffies and will carry around and play with a soft toy for years, while many others would immediately destroy it. Some dogs prefer Nylabones, some like Antlers, many love Bully Sticks, and some will go after anything. It is critical to offer only safe, durable chews and ALWAYS supervise your dog as they are chewing initially. Use caution with hide based chews and keep an eye out for larger pieces being swallowed.

Unfortunately, it is not up to us to establish these preferences, but we can stack the deck in our favor. KONG’s are a great option for almost all dogs.



Many trainers recommend KONGs as a first line of defense. Remember, a KONG can be stuffed with almost anything that the dog finds enjoyable, making it a much more stimulating toy. While teaching a dog how to utilize a KONG it is important that it is not too difficult to start with. Initially teach your dog how the Kong works by putting a few kibble or smelly treats loosely in the KONG and allow the dog to roll it around, so the treats fall out. Once they have mastered the first step and they understand that the KONG itself dispenses food, then you should begin to gradually increase the difficulty. Ultimately, you can freeze entire meals inside the KONG to keep your dog engaged for longer and longer periods of time.

Lastly, consider Canine Enrichment. Enrichment is a commonly heard buzzword, used to describe any activity that involves the use of the dog's brain and senses. Canine enrichment involves both mental and physical stimulation for dogs, tiring out both the brain and the body. Keep in mind, dogs were not bred to sit on the couch all day while you are at work. Most were bred to do a job- working long hours, typically with massive amounts of physical activity. Now, many dogs find themselves in an early retirement. Dogs get bored, and when that happens, you will see a lot of more destructive activities. This is not out of malice or spite, but much like the bored child who takes apart a toy to see how it works. An easy enrichment activity is to allow your dog to engage in a "Sniff walk." This means letting your dog pick the direction of the walk and letting them sniff to their heart's content. Utilizing puzzle toys and food dispensing toys or completing a training session are other examples enrichment activities.

At PetSmart, we want to help guide you to the best possible outcome. The goal is not to stop chewing. It is to stop destructive chewing on inappropriate objects. Providing safe puzzle toys and interactive games which your dog to use their brains, will help keep the peace and establish good habits.