

# DESTRUCTIVE CHEWING IN DOGS

Chewing is a perfectly normal behavior for dogs of all ages. Both wild and domestic dogs spend hours chewing. This activity keeps their jaws strong and their teeth clean. Puppies chew to relieve the pain of incoming teeth and to explore their environment. 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 direct their chewing behavior toward inappropriate items.

Both puppies and adult dogs should have a variety of appropriate and 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. They need to be taught in a gentle, humane manner.

## Common Causes of Destructive Chewing

- 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 display other signs of separation anxiety, such as whining, barking, pacing, restlessness, urination and defecation.
- Hunger – A dog on a calorie-restricted diet might chew and destroy objects in an attempt to find additional sources of nutrition. Dogs usually direct this kind of chewing toward objects related to food or that smell like food.
- Boredom & Social Isolation – A dog that is lacking mental and physical stimulation may start destructive chewing as an outlet to expend pent-up energy, to keep herself entertained and to get attention from you.
- Stress, Fears & Phobias – Any type of stress can cause a dog to start destructive chewing to relieve frustration and anxiety. A change in her environment, a change in schedule, new additions to the household, a scary noise, etc. can all be a cause of stress and frustration for a dog.

## What Can I Do?

The first step in correcting a destructive chewing problem is to find out the root cause of the chewing. Examine your household and jot down anything that has recently changed. Observe your dog closely to see if you can identify what occurs right before she starts chewing. Does she have adequate mental and physical stimulation?

It's also important to have realistic expectations for your dog. Remember, chewing is a normal behavior and inevitably your dog will, at some point, chew something you find valuable. Use this as a learning opportunity and think critically about the situation – discover what happened that may have caused the destructive chewing and do what you can to prevent it from happening the next time.

- Dog Proof Your House – Take responsibility of your own belongings. If you do not want your dog to chew on them, put them away or up out of her reach. If you do not want her to go into certain areas, you can close the door or use x-pens/baby gates to block the area off.
- Mental, Physical & Social Enrichment – Dogs get bored easily. A bored dog will look for ways to entertain herself – and chewing is one form of entertainment. Ensure your dog has appropriate and interactive outlets to expend her energy on – training classes/sessions, daily physical exercise, food puzzle toys, doggie play dates (if your dog likes the company of other dogs) and other forms of



enrichment.

- Dog-Safe Chew Toys - Provide your dog with a variety of dog-safe chew toys. Rotate the toys out often so she doesn't get bored with the same choices. Do not confuse your dog by offering her unwanted "people" items such as old couch cushions, socks or shoes to chew on.
- Supervision - If you are unable to keep an eye on your dog you can utilize a dog-safe room, a crate or a doggie daycare to keep her, and your items, safe.
- Catching Her in the Act - If you do happen to catch your dog in the act of chewing something inappropriate, you can utilize it as a teaching moment. Calmly take away the item from your dog and exchange it for an appropriate chewing item. Reward her with plenty of praise if she opts to chew on the appropriate item. Put the inappropriate item away and out of sight.
- Stress, Frustration & Anxiety - If you believe your dog's destructive chewing is the result of stress, frustration or anxiety try to identify the "trigger." Use positive reinforcement, desensitization and counter-conditioning to turn the "trigger" from something scary into something good. If you are unsure how to use the above techniques, find a certified professional trainer to help. To ease anxiety, you can play classical music or utilize pheromone/aromatherapy diffusers.
- Rewards - Any time you see your dog chewing on something appropriate, use the opportunity to reward her with ample amounts of praise and even a yummy treat.

### What Doesn't Work

- Do not show your dog the damage she did and spank, scold or punish her after the fact. **She cannot connect your punishment with a behavior she did hours or even minutes ago.** Punishment is likely to make a destructive chewing problem worse and may even cause other problems to develop.
- Do not leave your dog in a crate for lengthy periods of time (more than six hours) to prevent chewing.
- Do not muzzle your dog to prevent chewing.

For more information, please visit [azhumane.org](http://azhumane.org).

