

Why Dogs Chew

Chewing is a natural behavior for dogs of all ages. Puppies chew to relieve teething discomfort, while adult dogs chew to keep jaws strong, teeth clean, relieve boredom, or ease anxiety. Understanding the reasons behind chewing helps manage and redirect the behavior effectively.



Common Causes of Destructive Chewing

- **Teething Puppies:** Puppies explore the world with their mouths and chew to soothe gum pain. This phase ends around 7 months old. Provide frozen washcloths, ice cubes, or freezable dog toys to help.
- **Separation Anxiety:** Dogs with separation anxiety often chew when left alone. Look for additional signs like whining, pacing, and accidents. Ask for guidance on treating separation anxiety.
- **Fabric Sucking:** Some dogs compulsively lick, suck, or chew fabric. This may be linked to early weaning. If the behavior is excessive, consult a positive reinforcement-based trainer or veterinary behaviorist.
- **Hunger:** Dogs on restricted diets may chew on items that smell like food or are food-related.

How to Prevent & Manage Destructive Chewing

- **Dog-Proof Your Home:** Store valuable objects out of reach. Keep shoes in closets, laundry in hampers, and books on shelves.
- **Provide Chew Toys:** Offer a variety of safe chew toys and bones. Rotate toys to prevent boredom. Try puzzle feeders, KONGs, or bully sticks. Avoid rawhide due to safety risks.
- **Use Taste Deterrents:** Spray inappropriate chew items with deterrents like Bitter Apple or Chew Guard. Apply consistently for 2-4 weeks.
- **Teach Appropriate Chewing:** Redirect chewing to approved toys. If your dog chews something inappropriate, use "drop it" and trade for a treat or toy.
- **Supervise & Confine:** Until chewing is under control, supervise your dog or confine them to a crate or safe area with chew toys. Crate training can help but should not exceed 5 hours at a time.
- **Exercise & Mental Stimulation:** Boredom leads to destructive behaviors. Ensure your dog gets daily walks, playtime, training, or food puzzles to keep them engaged.

Frustration & Stress-Related Chewing

- **Environmental Triggers:** Dogs frustrated by confinement or missing out on activities may chew out of stress. Provide alternative outlets like rope toys or interactive games.
- **Redirect Energy:** Give dogs appropriate outlets for their frustration, such as tug toys, structured training, or interactive play sessions.

What NOT to Do

- **Avoid Punishment:** Scolding, spanking, or punishing after the fact does not help. Dogs cannot associate past chewing with punishment.
- **Do Not Use Inhumane Methods:** Taping a dog's mouth shut, tying objects to them, or muzzling for extended periods is cruel and ineffective.
- **Do Not Confine Excessively:** Crates should not be used for excessive confinement (over 5 hours). Dogs need interaction and exercise to stay happy and well-adjusted.

Need More Help?

Consider working with a Certified Professional Dog Trainer or enrolling in a positive reinforcement training class for additional support.