

# Chewing: Puppies and Dogs

*Tips for Dealing with Puppy and Adult Dogs That Chew*

## **CHEWING: PUPPIES AND DOGS**

Chewing is a very normal behavior for puppies and dogs. They use their mouths for grasping food, gaining information about the environment, relieving boredom, and reducing tension.

Chewing appears to be great fun. However, chewing could become a major problem when valued objects are damaged.

## **WHY DO DOGS CHEW?**

When you couple strong jaws with the curiosity and high energy of an exploring puppy, the result is an incredible chewing machine! The speed at which puppies can wreak havoc in a house, and the extent of damage they can do, can really take you by surprise. There are a variety of reasons why a puppy might chew.

## **SOME REASONS WHY DOGS AND PUPPIES CHEW**

- Noises behind a wall, such as a high pitched heater motor or the scurrying footsteps of a mouse, might trigger investigative chewing.
- A delay in feeding time may send a hungry dog off chewing into cabinets as he searches for food.
- Food spilled on a piece of furniture can cause a puppy to tear into it with his teeth in hopes of finding something tasty to eat.

Dogs make good pets because they have a very social nature and plenty of energy to share in activities with us. In return, we need to provide enough exercise, mental stimulation, and social interaction to avoid destructive behavior.

## **UNDERSTANDING YOUR PUPPY'S WORLD**

Puppies usually pass time or break the boredom by using their mouths, which may result in destructive behavior. Household destruction occurs because puppies are simply entertaining themselves.

Sometimes we unwittingly contribute to a puppy's problem by improper training. Puppies are unable to determine the difference between old shoes and new shoes, or between stuffed toys and the corner of a stuffed couch.

Likewise, tug-of-war games can set the puppy up to fail. A puppy or dog entertained by tearing a towel is tempted to attack curtains fluttering in a breeze.

## **WHAT ABOUT A SECOND PET?**

It is usually not the best course of action to get a second pet to help correct a chewing problem. In some cases, a second pet may serve to distract the destructive pet away from chewing. But it is just as likely that the problems could double, especially if the second pet is another puppy.

## **A LITTLE GUIDANCE**

The first step in correcting a chewing problem is to guide your puppy's chewing toward acceptable chew toys.

- Choose a variety of good quality, safe products. When your puppy shows you what he likes, buy several more of the same type.
- Hollow rubber toys work well since biscuits can be wedged inside for your puppy to pry out. This gives him a job to do and helps keep his focus away from your possessions.
- Another way of keeping your puppy focused on putting his mouth on the toys is to teach him to play fetch.
- Never take proper chewing for granted. Take an active roll in rewarding desirable chewing with lots of encouragement and praise.
- Give your pet plenty of praise every time he chews on his toys. Occasionally give a small reward, such as Iams® Puppy Formula Biscuits for Puppies, to strongly reinforce the behavior.

## **PROTECTING YOUR POSSESSIONS!**

Until you can trust your puppy, he must be under constant supervision or confined to a safe area. During times when he is with you, he might sneak off by himself to chew. Consider using a leash to keep him within eyesight. A crate, dog run, or safe room will keep him out of trouble when he cannot be watched.

As your puppy is allowed more freedom, he can be taught to avoid forbidden objects if you make them taste bad. Choose an effective, commercial, bitter- or hot-tasting spray to safeguard objects. If he has the habit of chewing specific items, such as clothing, make sure that all clothing is out of reach except one or two items that are sprayed with a bad-tasting spray.

Every day, move the items to new positions around the house. In four or five days change the type of item. This teaches the dog to leave your clothing alone because he associates them with a bad taste.

"Booby traps" are successful since they punish your puppy during the act and do not require your presence. A stack of empty beverage cans set up to fall over when something moves can be effective in safeguarding certain objects. Motion-activated alarms are often effective in teaching a puppy to stay off furniture or out of plants.

## **WHAT NOT TO DO**

- Corrections and reprimands are rarely effective by themselves.
- Under no circumstances should your puppy be spanked, slapped, kicked, or physically punished in any way. There is a risk he will become hand shy or a fear-biter. Instead, offer a verbal reprimand followed by encouragement to chew on a proper chew toy.
- To be most effective, the reprimand must be given during or immediately after the misbehavior, and every time it occurs.
- Reprimands can backfire by either teaching the dog to be sneaky about chewing, or by teaching him not to chew anything, even toys, in your presence.

This information was provided by Wayne Hunthausen, DVM, Director of Animal Behavior Consultations in the Kansas City metropolitan area.