

Chewing – A natural tendency

Puppies are chewing machines. The inherited tendency to investigate the surroundings is very strong in a young dog. Evolution encourages young wolf cubs to use their mouths to learn about their environment as well as to find additional food sources. This tendency is still very present in the family dog, even though he is adequately provided with food. Your success in preventing chewing problems depends on how effectively you can channel your pup's tendency toward acceptable toys rather than household goods.

Chewing stages

The two distinct periods when excessive chewing is likely to occur are during teething at around three months, and during the time when the permanent teeth become set in the jaw, between 6 and 12 months. Regardless of these excessive periods, the young 7-week old pup will continually attempt to investigate objects through his mouth. It is at this young age when he should be taught what is acceptable to chew and what is unacceptable. If done early, a chewing preference can be established so that during the excessive chewing periods the response will be contained to the preferred items.

Things to watch for

One common mistake people frequently make is to provide the puppy with old socks or shoes, chewables that in texture resemble valued objects. But the puppy cannot distinguish between the old shoe and a good one. If he learns that chewing leather is acceptable then all leather goods become fair game. Another area people often overlook concerns the pup's ingestion of harmful objects. A young pup is not capable of reasoning out what could or could not be harmful to him - he learns through doing. Unfortunately, some lessons can be damaging or even fatal to him.

How to limit chewing

In order to ensure that his chewing response becomes attached to a limited number of objects and also to prevent a harmful or fatal experience read the following recommendations carefully. You'll not only be preventing damage but may also save his life.

1. Never leave a puppy unattended unless he's restricted to a damage-proof area.
2. Select no more than three or four objects for him to chew.
3. Make sure that these items cannot be swallowed or chewed into splinters.
 - a. Hard, nylon bones OR Hard rubber toys
 - b. A hard knucklebone recommended by your veterinarian
4. When the pup begins to chew something he shouldn't, correct him with a raised voice and remove the object. Immediately, offer him one of his toys, but do not force it into his mouth. Simply place it before him and praise him.
5. After he is finished chewing the toy, spray unacceptable items with either Bitter Apple or rubbing alcohol and put it back in his mouth. Praise him when he spits it out and repeat several times.
6. If he doesn't spit it out, spray the end of a Q-tip with Bitter Apple and place briefly in the pup's mouth first, then follow with the object.
7. Periodically take him, never call him, to those unacceptable items, which he's previously chewed. Remind him to stay away by very lightly spraying the item with Bitter Apple then inserting into his mouth.
8. Occasionally praise him when he's chewing his acceptable items.

9. Take him to all electrical cords within reach and repeat steps 6, 7 and 8. (You may want to unplug the cord from the wall socket first to prevent him from electrocuting himself while undergoing this training step. Until he learns to spit the cord out, he may bite down on it.) Remember to praise him when he spits out the cord.
10. Pick up all potentially harmful objects such as needles and pins or anything else that could be easily ingested. Get into the habit of looking for trouble before it occurs.

If you consistently follow these recommendations, your pup will pass through a troublesome stage of development without harm to himself or to your home. Do both of you a favor and start him out right.