

Prevent Your Puppy's Destructive Chewing

It's perfectly natural for puppies to want to explore their surroundings. Two primary ways of getting to know the world around them are through their noses and mouths, which is why many puppies can be seen smelling or chewing on just about everything they encounter.

Preventing Destructive Chewing Using a Constructive Multi-Pronged Approach

Not long ago I trained an adorable five-month-old Labrador Retriever puppy whose owner had tried for months to correct her puppy's chronic chewing problem.

Prior to meeting with her, she had attempted to solve the problem by disciplining her puppy after-the-fact, whenever she returned home from work and found that he had chewed something. The chewing continued, and so did the discipline, until finally she realized that nothing was getting any better.

Then one day -- in a desperate attempt to curtail her puppy's destructiveness -- she went out and bought over a hundred dollars worth of chew toys and rawhide bones!

According to the owner, it was heaven for the first couple of days while the puppy played with all his exciting new toys and left the furniture intact. It didn't take long, however, for the puppy to grow bored and return to gnawing on chair legs, sofa cushions, and rug fringes.

Soon after, she called me to set up an appointment. When I arrived almost a week later for our initial consultation, I noticed that the living room was a virtual Toys-R-Us for puppies! And clearly, neither after-the-fact discipline nor truckloads worth of puppy toys were the answer. Instead, I recommended the following multi-prong approach to correcting the puppy's chewing problem:

1)Puppy-proof your home . Instead of constantly reprimanding a young puppy for getting into things, puppy-proof any areas of the house to which your puppy will be given access, in much the same way one would child-proof an area for a baby:

- Temporarily take up any throw rugs.
- Place all plants, poisonous substances, household cleaners, trash receptacles, paper products (such as tissue and toilet paper), shoes, and any small chewable objects out of reach.
- Either remove, cover or tape down all accessible electrical wires.
- Remove or secure heavy objects which could fall or be pulled down and cause injury to the puppy.

2) Limit the number of toys. While all puppies should have toys to play with, the problem with providing your puppy with too many toys is that it makes it more difficult for the puppy to differentiate what's his from what's yours. Do not provide a destructive puppy with more than a few toys at a time. (This rule does not apply to dogs who are not destructive chewers). ROTATE THEM so they always seem to have something new.

3) Safely confine your puppy. Use a suitably sized crate or wire-reinforced puppy gate whenever you're unable to safely supervise him. When introduced properly and used correctly, crate training is a safe, preventive, effective and humane housetraining tool, which provides the puppy with a secure, protective den, while offering his owner peace of mind. Please note: Introduce your puppy to his new crate using positive association (ie: feed him in his crate), and never use his crate as a punishment. Never allow small children to play in the dog's crate. This is his safety zone.

4) Offer him lots of outdoor exercise. Puppies who are destructive indoors, need one to two hours of active outdoor exercise daily, provided they are fully immunized. Teaching your puppy to retrieve a ball, toy, or Frisbee will help cure his chronic chewing problem. [Note: If your puppy doesn't have at least 2 "shots" yet, it is probably NOT safe to allow him to play with other dogs (other than those who are already part of your household) or to give him any access to outdoor areas where neighborhood dogs "go".

5) Offer your puppy playtime with a puppy playmate. (remember the 2 shot recommendation)

Lots of active play each day, keeps the hyperactive puppy demons away !

6) Obedience train your puppy. Just 5 to 15 minutes of training a day can make a big difference. For young, immature and hyperactive puppies who have difficulty concentrating during lengthy obedience lessons, even a few 30-second obedience training "mini-sessions" offered on a daily basis will prove very helpful. Remember to remain upbeat throughout, and always end your sessions on positive note!

There are several ways you can learn how to train your dog, including:

- training [books](#) and [videos](#)
- group obedience classes (highly recommended, try www.sportsmens.net or contact your vet or a local groomer to find out whom they recommend)
- private in-home training (very expensive if you ask me)

7) Enroll your puppy in an agility training class. Agility training helps build coordination and confidence, offers your puppy substantial exercise, and is great fun! You might have to go through basic training first.

8) Apply Bitter Apple spray or salve to accessible woodwork and furniture legs. The bitter taste is usually an effective deterrent for most puppies. Follow directions on the bottle!

9) Avoid the futile after-the-fact discipline syndrome. In order to successfully correct your puppy's misbehavior, you must either catch your puppy in the act, or, better yet, work on

preventing his misbehavior to begin with.

10) Call me if you are having a difficult time, this is part of our relationship!!

Choose Suitable Chew Toys

Rather than attempting to stifle your puppy's chewing tendencies, his desire to chew should be constructively channeled and directed towards acceptable items such as his chew toys. Avoid giving your puppy discarded socks, shoes, sneakers or other articles of clothing. While some puppies may learn to differentiate between those things which are his and those which are yours, most puppies cannot. They won't know 'old shoes' from new shoes...

When it comes to choosing which toys to give your puppy, these are the primary qualities to look for:

Safety. Only allow him those toys and balls which can not be chewed apart or accidentally swallowed. Also, beware of bells, buttons and squeakers, which may be hazardous if chewed off of a toy and swallowed.

Durability. Good chew toys should last a long time. Latex as opposed to vinyl or hard plastic.

- **Fun.** If it is not, your puppy won't want to play with it.
- **Ease of cleaning.** After all, who wants to spend all of their time cleaning chew toys? I throw mine into the wash along with the dogs bedding.

I especially recommend the following toys:

- 1) The Tuffy or Kong.** These are not only great chew toys, but are also great retrieve toys as well. They have plenty of "give" for puppies who are teething, and are also virtually indestructible for most dogs. In my opinion, they are two of the best puppy toys on the market.
- 2) Other durable rubber balls.** Both the solid and hollow thick rubber balls can be rolled across floor for puppy to chase and chew.
- 3) Tennis balls** are perfect for teaching medium to large sized puppies to retrieve.
- 4) Starballs.** These odd-shaped, erratic-bouncing balls are ideal for the consummate retriever

who likes a bit of a challenge.

5) which are both hardy enough to last with most puppies, yet are not so hard as to discourage chewing. (Some dogs can chew their toys apart in a surprisingly short period of time. Should this happen with your puppy, remove any pieces which can be swallowed immediately.)

6) Activity Balls. Fill these toys with kibble or your puppy's favorite treats and watch the fun begin.

7) For special occasions knuckle bones from the pet store that are sterilized beef marrow bones.