



# SAN TAN CANINE TRAINING NEWSLETTER

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## Chew on This!

Normal chewing cleans your dog's teeth, massages the gums, and exercises the jaws.  
But dog owners need to channel this instinct.

Like their lupine predecessors, dogs boast impressive chewing apparatus – powerful jaws and forty-two permanent teeth designed to grip, gnaw, crush, and tear. While this mouthful of equipment helped your dog's ancestors survive, today's dogs hardly ever need to capture and shred their food. Yet, driven by instinct, dogs still need to chew, and if owners don't channel this instinct, it can wreak havoc with the household furnishings.

### C-H-E-W Spells Pain Relief

Chewing is part of normal jaw and tooth development. Young puppies chew largely to relieve the discomfort associated with tooth eruption (teething). And the temporary comfort that chewing provides encourages further chewing.

Although pups tend to chew indiscriminately, you can teach them what's appropriate and safe to chew. Before you bring your new pup home, procure several safe and tooth-healthy chew toys, such as Kongs®. Also, comb your dog's new habitat and remove as many household chewables as possible.

Every time your pup chews something you don't want it chewing, firmly say "out" or "leave it" – then remove the object and replace it with an acceptable chew toy. You can also steer your pup in the right direction if you add flavoring to "chewies" or use them as toys during play sessions.

To relieve teething pain that triggers chewing, try giving your pup a rolled up wet washcloth that you had in the freezer to chew on. But retrieve the washcloth before it thaws; otherwise, your dog might think similar accessories – like hand towels – are fair game for chewing.

When you can't directly supervise your puppy's chewing escapades, consider confining the animal to a warm, comfortable crate. But make sure you first acclimate your pup to the "den" by feeding and playing with him or her inside the crate. If your pup doesn't shred and eat chew toys, leave a chew toy in the crate. However, don't try this with a zealous chomper.

### Chewing Away Stress

Some adult dogs chew to relieve emotional stress, especially the stress caused by separation anxiety or lack of environmental stimulation that we call boredom. Stress-related chewing almost always occurs when the owner's not present, but even a relaxed dog may chew while you're away if the animal previously was punished for chewing.

To resolve chewing caused by separation anxiety, you may have to try several techniques. None, however, involve punishment, which only makes matters worse. First, take the emotion out of your comings and goings by completely ignoring your dog for fifteen minutes before leaving and after returning. "Trick" your dog into thinking you're on your way out by grabbing your keys, your coat, and so on – and then sitting quietly in a chair. But focus most of your effort on graduated departures. Leave your dog alone for short, then gradually increasing, periods of time. Increase your "stay away" time only when your dog seems OK with the last separation period.

Some dogs that chew as a result of separation anxiety go berserk when crated, so confinement may not be a viable option. Some dogs benefit from antianxiety medication, but a few may not adapt to solitude under any circumstances. Such dogs may require a full-time pet sitter or a reputable "doggie day care" facility.

If boredom fuels your dog's destructive chewing, enliven the environment. The simplest form of environmental enrichment is thirty to sixty minutes of daily aerobic exercise. Be consistent with exercise; dogs may turn to destructive chewing if they are exercised only sporadically.



## Preventing Problem Chewing

You can try to divert your dog from problem chewing by carefully selecting toys and avoiding certain types of games. Never give your dog old shoes, socks, or clothing as chew toys. As savvy as dogs are, they can't tell a worn pair of slippers from brand-new dress shoes. For similar reasons, steer clear of toys that resemble household items, like shoe-shaped rawhide chews. And avoid overindulging your dog with too many toys. A dog with twenty-three toys may get the idea that anything is okay to chew on. Tug of war games also may encourage excessive chewing (not to mention aggression).

You can also minimize the risk of problem chewing by obedience training and socializing your dog with people and other dogs so it develops confidence and independence. Additionally, refrain from any behavior your dog might construe as a reward for chewing. For example, don't replace an inappropriate chewable with a food treat. Although you're redirecting the dog to an acceptable object, the dog thinks it's getting a tasty reward for chewing the chair.

Although most canine chewing problems involve too much chewing, occasionally a dog will chew less than necessary. "Dogs with painful teeth or gums often chew slowly or on one side of their mouth. Take note of your

dog's normal chewing habits, and contact your veterinarian if you see any changes one way or another. No matter how carefully you "chew proof" your home, your dog may still manage to find unsafe or inappropriate chewables. If you can't eliminate such chew objects from your household, you can at least try to make them unpalatable.

The handiest approach is to use one of several commercial sprays or ointments that impart a bad taste to household objects. But hot pepper sauce, alum (a bitter-tasting, saltlike substance that you can dissolve and "paint" on surfaces), and Vicks VapoRub® are all potions you can also use to deter chewers that seem "immune" to commercial antichew products.

Taste aversion has two advantages: it works even when you're absent, and your dog associates the unpleasantness with the target object – not with you. But don't use this technique if your dog chews to relieve anxiety. With anxiety-based chewing, even such a mild punishment may raise anxiety levels and worsen bad behavior.



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