

Promote mental, dental and overall physical health with chew treats!

Dogs, especially puppies, need to chew. If you don't provide good chews for them, they will find their own, often your furniture! Chew treats provide pleasure, mental and physical exercise, and help make a dog who is easy to live with.

Appropriate chew treats help keep dogs' gums and teeth healthy. Canine dental work has become a "routine" maintenance procedure, one that requires a general anesthetic. Surgery is expensive and never without risk. *Healthy* dogs who eat a fresh, meat and vegetable diet often have much cleaner teeth and better gums than those eating grain-based dry food, and seldom need dental work. Chews and stuffed toys, some designed for dental stimulation, can provide needed exercise for gums and teeth and aid in plaque removal.

For some dogs, chews are not an option. Poorly aligned teeth may break when dogs chew hard objects. Some dogs have thin tooth enamel, easily worn away. Consult your veterinarian about the safety of hard chews for your dog. If they can't chew, you may need to brush their teeth on a daily basis. This small chore may save your dog the risk and you the expense of veterinary dental cleaning.

Rawhide: don't use it! Rawhide chews are high in fat, add no beneficial nutrients, and can cause blockages in the stomach or intestines, a life-threatening event. Any form of rawhide can be irritating: we have known many dogs with chronic diarrhea, diagnosed with food "issues", who actually had a problem with rawhide.

Green treats promoted for dental health or just for chewing often have a gluten base. Gluten is one of the most common allergens for dogs. It has no place in a dog's diet.

Other cooked or smoked body parts require careful evaluation for each individual. Chews like tracheas and tendons are digestible and add beneficial cartilage to the diet. However, an enthusiastic large dog can choke on them. Discard pieces that are small enough to swallow. Be careful of hoofs: Dogs can break a tooth on them. We do not recommend pigs' ears because they are extremely high in fat.

Bones provide a natural source of glucosamine, chondroitin, collagen, and calcium for healthier joints and connective tissue. Bones can sometimes be excellent, and sometimes a danger.

Know your chewers! Whether the bones are raw or cooked, heavy chewers can destroy a large knucklebone in a short time, and this is a heavy digestive load. Dogs raised on bones seldom overdo chewing (this may not apply to the average Labrador!), but should be supervised closely until you are confident that they are safe with the bones you give them.

Bones cooked at high temperatures may splinter. Sterilized and cooked bones may be fine for a light chewer who will gradually wear the bone away. Heavy chewers should stick to raw bones.

Raw bones are best. Small dogs do well with slices of femur, the round bones, which may be cut to under an inch or up to a foot. Beef knucklebones are great for larger dogs, and some smaller ones. Fresh bones are a rich source of good fats, but they provide a lot of calories, and

If your dog doesn't need the calories, remove as much fat from bones as you can. Start slow, with a 5 or 10 minute chewing time allowed. Dogs who destroy what they are given rapidly need to move up a couple of notches in durability. Raw bones may be stored in the refrigerator or freezer, but thaw them out before use: ice is very hard!

Promote mental health and agility with treat balls and food-stuffed toys, which provide an interesting challenge for your dogs, with no side effects! Few dogs can destroy the all-purpose Kong, These can be stuffed with almost anything: A few crunchy bits, a piece of cheese, and a smear of peanut butter can keep dogs working for a long time. Kongs can be left safely with most dogs when you leave the house, and can help a dog through the difficult first hour you are gone.

Treat balls stimulate the brain. They work best when stuffed with tiny crunchy treats. If you feed dry food, use some of the food for stuffing the ball, and watch your dog roll, bounce or shake the ball to get at the food!

There are many new choices in both these categories. These toys take a beating, so look for durability.

Supervise all chew activities carefully.

Good chews provide mental and physical stimulation, entertain dogs without your active participation, and help keep the teeth and gums clean and healthy. They add to the quality of your dog's days, helping them live longer, more satisfying lives.