

# Chewing

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Chewing is a natural behaviour for puppies and adult dogs. It will be important to have safe toys for your dog to chew on throughout his life. Puppies will put just about anything in their mouths, so it is your job to make sure your puppy knows what is appropriate to chew on and what is not.

With a new puppy in the house, it is a good idea to **puppy-proof your home**. This can protect your puppy from hurting himself and save your shoes, clothing, pillows, toys, and your home from destructive chewing. Plush toys and most squeaky toys are not much help in relieving the discomfort of cutting new teeth, nor will they satisfy the puppy's need to chew. If you do not want the puppy to chew on shoes, do not give him an old shoe to chew on. The same holds true for all other items in your home. The puppy cannot distinguish between old or new, and expensive or inexpensive, so make sure chew toys are chew toys and not other items.

If your puppy has something in his mouth that should not be there, offering him a safe toy in exchange for the inappropriate item can be your first step in addressing this behaviour. However, you cannot spend the rest of your life walking around the house trading items for toys with your puppy. You will want to teach your puppy what the cue "Leave it" means.

You can teach him what this cue means in a few different ways. For the first method, you can show the puppy a treat and hold it in your hand or put it on a chair or coffee table. When the puppy goes toward the treat, say "Leave-it" in an authoritative voice. If your puppy tries to get the treat, move the treat out of his reach quickly. If your puppy stops the forward movement, and turns his attention toward you instead of the treat, mark and reward him with a different treat and remove the treat you asked him to leave alone. Repeat this exercise several times over many days until you can put the treat right on the coffee table or right in front of the puppy's nose and say, "Leave-it," and he looks at you instead of the treat. When he leaves it completely alone and does not try to take it, and he looks at you consistently, he is now beginning to understand what the cue "Leave it" means. Once your puppy is good about leaving the treat alone while you are right next to him, try placing the treat on a table and taking one or two steps away from the treat. When your puppy goes near the treat, give the cue "Leave-it," but stay close to the treat in case he tries to grab it. If he goes for the treat, say the cue "Leave-it" quickly in an authoritative voice. If he stops going for the treat, mark the behaviour with "Yes" or a click on the clicker and reward him with a different treat. If he does not stop going for the treat, quickly remove the treat before he gets it. Repeat this many times until you can give the cue "Leave-it" and take a few steps away without him trying to grab the treat. In time, he will learn that when you give the cue "Leave-it," he is to drop whatever he has in his mouth or simply not put the object in his mouth in the first place.

A second way you can teach your puppy the cue *leave-it* involves a soft, rubbery treat (like a piece of cooked chicken hot dog). Show the puppy the treat and then place the treat under your shoe. Make sure you are wearing close-toed shoes. At first, your puppy may scratch and dig at your shoe with the treat under it to try and get it. Do not say a word; stand up

straight and wait. The second he looks at you instead of the treat, mark and reward the behaviour with a different treat. Repeat this exercise many times until he consistently looks at you instead of trying to get the treat from under your foot. Never give the puppy the treat you want him to leave alone, or you will confuse him. You can use the treat under your foot later on, but not while you are training this behaviour. Once your puppy stops trying to get the treat from under your shoe and looks up at you consistently, you can take this a step further. Next time, put the treat on the floor under your shoe while saying "Leave-it" in an authoritative voice. Uncover the treat so your puppy can see it. If the puppy tries to get the treat, cover it with your foot immediately so he cannot get it. Wait a few seconds and try again. Repeat this exercise until your puppy looks at the treat on the floor, ignores it, and looks at you instead.

Once your puppy has been successful with ignoring the treat, it is time to make it a little more challenging for him. This time, throw a few treats on the floor and say "Leave-it." Make sure the treats are close enough together so you can cover them quickly if he tries to get one of them. Repeat this exercise several times until your puppy can look at all those wonderful treats on the floor, ignore them, and look at you. Once he has successfully accomplished this many times over many days, he will know what to do when you give the cue "Leave-it." "Leave-it" means, if it is in his mouth, he is to drop it. If he is thinking about putting something in his mouth, the cue "Leave-it" also means do not to touch that item. The steps in the second method above are nicely demonstrated in the Puppy Smarts Chewing video.

Dogs enjoy chewing throughout their lives. It is important that your puppy and adult dog have safe toys and bones to chew on. Hard bones, rubber toys, and toys that you can put some treats in for the puppy to work for are perfect chew toys. Besides meeting his need to chew, toys you can place treats in will also offer him mental stimulation.

If your puppy or adult dog seems to be chewing excessively, there may be other reasons for this behaviour. Your puppy may have a dental problem that needs to be addressed with our vet. If he is between six and nine months of age, his permanent teeth are erupting, and chewing may increase dramatically. During this stage in your puppy's life, it will be a good idea to confine him to his crate when he cannot be supervised, even if he has been trustworthy in the past. This is an age when chewing is at the top of his priority list, and just about anything can be fair game.



*If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us*