

## Helping the Chew-a-holic

Some dogs just seem addicted to chewing. Everything in the house is considered a chew toy in their mind. A young dog needs to chew on things to help teeth break through the gums. Older dogs need to chew to exercise their jaws, and, well, and if a dog is bored, chewing is just plain fun! Unfortunately, there isn't much you can do to stop your dog's natural need and desire to chew. You can, however, redirect his chewing to appropriate items. When your dog begins to chew something inappropriate, trade him for an appropriate toy. He'll happily trade once he learns he will get something great in return, and you will be able to save many a shoe from destruction. The following are some suggestions for great, safe toys and games for the avid chewer.

1. *Meet the KONG:* Many people will turn to rawhide bones help satisfy some chewing, but as they disappear quickly, which means all that rawhide is going into your dog's intestines. Too much rawhide is very hard for a dog to digest and may get clogged up inside them. The best toy around to help with chewing is a KONG. It's a hard rubber toy shaped like a honeycomb. You can stuff yummy treats inside to help keep the dog chewing and playing longer with the KONG. There are a variety of sizes, so you want to make sure that you get the right one for your dog's size and strength. Be sure to look for the KONG brand as they are definitely made for the power chewer and are virtually indestructible. They may cost a little more than some of the other toys, but the up front expense is worth it to save all those shoes--and fingers--from getting chewed.
2. *Turning your dog into a KONG-a-holic:* You can stuff a variety of things into a KONG to make your dog really have to work at it. At first make it simple, mix a little peanut butter with some kibble and stuff it inside, and put a biscuit in the end to start your dog off with an easy treat. After your dog gets the idea, you can layer the items in the KONG by putting some biscuit bits in first, then some canned food mixed with kibble, then pack some peanut butter in and stick a biscuit out of the end. This will keep your dog entertained for a while. When you go away for the day, hide a few KONGS around the house so not only is your dog having fun eating the KONG, but he gets to hunt a little too.
3. *Games with the KONG:* Once your dog learns how much fun a KONG can be, try putting a rope through the end of the KONG, stuff the KONG, then hang it from a tree in the backyard low enough for the dog to reach it with her mouth. The dog will work hard jumping and running around getting the treats out. After a while, be sure to take it down and allow the dog the reward of finishing the KONG while lying quietly.
4. *Cleaning the KONG:* One great aspect of the KONG is that it can be put in the dishwasher after each use. Always clean all dog toys periodically, but the KONG needs to be cleaned more often because of the food that may stay stuck on the inside. If you decide to get a KONG, when you go to the store you will be amazed at the many types of KONGS available. The good ol' honeycomb one is the best for avid chewers. The retrieving toys with ropes are a lot of fun for playing and the rope feels good for teething, but this toy shouldn't be left with your dog to just chew. The nice thing about the retrieving toys is that you can replace the ropes through the KONG company, so the whole toy doesn't have to be replaced when the rope wears down.
5. *Other safe chew toys:* Nylabones are hard plastic bones that many dogs enjoy chewing, especially those that have an affinity for plastic (the ones that choose Barbies and pens as chew toys). Be sure to look for the original hard plastic Nylabones, not the soft ones that pieces may break off as the dog chews. Also, Buster Cubes are a great form of entertainment. These cubes can be filled with dry kibble. As the dog pushes the cube around, kibble slowly falls out rewarding the dog as he plays.

Always inspect your dog's toys to be sure they are safe to play with. Throw away worn toys and replace them with new. Keep a toy box of dog toys that you control and take out when you want to play with your dog; this way your dog will not get bored with his toys and will look forward to fun times with you.