

YOUR DOG'S NEED TO CHEW

By Kathleen Dillon

Chewing. It's a basic instinct, one that can be both beneficial and harmful. Harmful to the dog - and to those expensive leather shoes you just invested in! Chewing stems from several different areas: in puppies it's the need for something with resistance to chew on while their teeth and jaws are developing, for cutting puppy teeth, to induce the growth of permanent teeth and to assist in getting rid of the puppy teeth in due time, and then to assist the permanent teeth through the gums and to assure the normal jaw development. Tooth and jaw development will normally continue until about one year of age, but sometimes even longer depending upon breed, rate of calcium utilization, chewing exercise and many other factors. Puppies also explore everything with their mouths, quite similar to how toddlers are always putting things in their mouths.

The adult dog's need to chew stems from the instinct designed for teeth cleaning, jaw exercise and gum massage. But chewing can also be an outlet for tension, loneliness and even spite. Tartar accumulates at the gum line of dogs and these accumulations, if not removed, bring irritation, erode the tooth enamel and eventually destruction of teeth at the roots. Most adult chewing is a result of them trying to do something about the problem themselves.

You can help him out in the tartar control area by taking him to your vet at least once a year to have his teeth cleaned. Also, there are products specially designed to help with tartar control, dental chew bones and even doggie tooth brushes and tooth paste are available!

Saving your possessions from the target of chewing is accomplished by re-directing this need to chew to objects you provide that are acceptable for chewing. When the puppy begins to chew on something it shouldn't, take it away or stop the chewing and give the pup a chew toy or bone – something of his that is acceptable to chew on. With patience and repetition he will learn what he is allowed to gnaw away on. And remember that you will reap the benefits of many happy years with a well-behaved family companion.

There seems to be an almost endless variety of items to choose from for the purpose of providing pets with chew items and toys and individual preferences, as well as the dog's preferences, will play a role in your choices. However, there are choices that are safer than others for your pet. It is very important that he not be allowed to chew on anything that he can break or indigestible things that he can tear into pieces and swallow. Indigestible things, such as toys made of rubber compounds or plastics, can cause intestinal stoppage. Large pieces or knots of rawhide can cause choking or intestinal stoppage. It's also a good idea to steer away from real bones because sharp pieces that come off the bone as it breaks and is swallowed could pierce the intestine wall. Toys with squeakers in them are also not a good idea. Some of the best toys are knots of thick rope, artificial bones made of hard rubber, balls and chew toys made of hard rubber and artificial bones made of rawhide particles that can be safely swallowed. So when providing your dog an outlet for this most natural need, "gnaw" over these concerns as you make your choices on play toys and chew toys.