

HOW TO CHOOSE SAFE CHEW TOYS & TREATS



Dogs love to chew! Giving your dog appropriate things to chew on is good for their teeth and gums, keeps them occupied, and decreases the tendency to chew on things they shouldn't. But did you know some chews you can buy for your pet are actually harmful? Unlike toys for children, there are no rules or regulations regarding toys for pets. Just because you can buy an item in a store, does not mean it's good for your dog!

You may know that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) works to keep foods and drugs safe for you and your family, but you may not realize the agency does much of the same for your pets. Medications for pets have to go through the FDA approval process just as human ones do. The FDA issues regular reports and warnings to pet owners about pet food and treats but few Americans are aware of them. Large recalls usually make the news but smaller ones don't. Even when problems are evident, the FDA does not always respond by taking products off the market. Despite numerous deaths from grain-free diets and jerky treats, these products are still widely available.



So what should you avoid?

Because there is no government oversight of pet toys, plastic ones made in China can't be trusted. They are not food grade or BPA-free plastic, they may be contaminated with heavy metals, and the plastic may be thin and weak, which means pieces can tear off. Squeaky toys are worrisome because the squeaker can come loose and be swallowed. Squeakers also may be made of unsafe metals. In one study, about half of balls taken off pet store shelves and analyzed had lead in them. The same warnings apply to plastic food dishes.

Make sure any rubber, plastic or vinyl toys you choose are sturdy, heavy-weight and large enough that your pet can't choke on it. The same goes for balls. Balls should be larger than the dog can fit in the back of his mouth. Try to find products made in the US.

Tennis balls are great for playing fetch but the fuzz on the outside is very abrasive to the teeth. Dogs that carry tennis balls around all the time will wear the enamel off their teeth. Put them away when the game is over.

Old, well-washed and rinsed plastic milk or soda bottles make good chew toys. Frisbees are always popular. Old socks and shoes are NOT good choices – your dog can't be expected to understand the difference between old shoes and your best shoes.

Toys with small parts that your dog could swallow or choke on are common. Avoid any toy for dogs or cats that has strings, googly eyes, feathers, or any other part that could come off.

Avoid items that are too hard. The most common treats on which dogs break their teeth are bones, antlers, cow hooves/chew hooves and ice cubes. We have also seen fractured teeth from Nylabones™ and other hard plastic items. If you can't flex an item in the package, it's too hard. Biting down just right on a hard object causes a piece of the tooth to shear off. If the tooth breaks such that the tooth root is exposed, the tooth will be very painful and will subsequently become infected.



Because this usually happens to the large back premolar that is difficult to see, your dog may be in pain for many months before you even know there is a problem. **Do not give your dog chew hooves, raw bones or antlers** – period. It does not matter how big your dog is. In fact, it's usually the big dogs who are the most aggressive chewers and the most likely to break their teeth.

Illnesses reported to the FDA by owners and veterinarians in dogs that have eaten bone treats have included:

- Gastrointestinal obstruction (blockage in the digestive tract)
- Choking
- Cuts and wounds in the mouth or on the tonsils
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Bleeding from the rectum, and/or
- Death. Approximately fifteen dogs reportedly died after eating a bone treat.

If your dog likes ice cubes, switch to shaved ice instead. Beef bones are only safe if they are boiled and softened. Chicken, turkey, or other small bones can splinter and cause punctures in the mouth, esophagus or intestines, so these also should never be fed to pets.

Another popular item is the rawhide chew. Rawhides come in all different sizes and shapes and sometimes even flavors. Unfortunately, many of them are preserved in formalin or formaldehyde, which are carcinogens and can also be toxic to the liver. Most of the rawhides that contain these toxic preservatives are from foreign countries. Their use is restricted in the U.S., so rawhides made here in the states are usually safe. Keep searching until you find the ones made here and don't buy any made in other countries.

If your dog swallows large pieces of rawhide that could cause choking, switch to a smaller or larger form that prevents this. Do not give your dog rawhides if it gives him diarrhea or an upset stomach. Do not give rawhides unless you are there to keep an eye on him – choking on rawhides is common.

Pigs' ears, turkey feet, pizzle sticks and other preserved animal parts can cause choking, too. In addition, **any animal parts can give your dog**

Salmonella, E. coli, Listeria or any of several other bacterial diseases. These are all zoonotic diseases – ones that can make humans sick as well. Dogs with food poisoning can make us sick, too!

Raw meat or bones are not safe for dogs or people. Not only can uncooked bones break teeth but, like the animal parts listed above, they can also give your dog or cat Salmonella, Toxoplasmosis, E. coli or other food poisoning. There is no nutritional advantage to feeding raw meat so there is no logical reason to ever do so.

What Toys Should I Choose?

Kong toys are highly recommended. They are heavy-weight, rubber, come in several sizes, and have a hollow center into which you can stuff a little peanut butter, cream cheese, liver sausage or other food treat. Your dog will spend hours working at getting the food out with his tongue. A dog thus occupied is much less likely to be getting into trouble chewing on other things, especially if the Kong toy is brought out only as a special treat whenever you leave the house. There are other sturdy rubber toys available as well that are good. The ones we sell are made to be visible on an X-ray should your dog swallow a piece of it.



Beware of toys with only one hole in them! Suction can be created with these such that a dog can get its tongue trapped inside the toy. The tongue starts to swell, making things worse, and if the toy is not removed in time part of the tongue can die and need to be surgically removed.

Pieces of rope with a knot at each end are a good choice of chew toy as they are soft and gentle on teeth and gums. Throw them away when they start to unravel. Soft plush toys usually don't last long and if the stuffing is swallowed it can cause an intestinal blockage. Take these away as soon as they start to come apart, which in some dogs may be in a matter of minutes.

Nylabones®, Gumabones® and other nylon bones are sometimes good, although some of these are hard enough to fracture teeth. Pick one on the softer side – you should be able to flex it inside the package. If your puppy is teething, try placing a nylon toy in the freezer for a few hours. A chilled one helps numb the gums. Make sure the toy was made in the USA.

Whatever toy you choose, use common sense and look for tough, long-lasting, and durable choices. If your dog likes what you've chosen, he'll be sure to put it to the test!

The FDA has repeatedly issued alerts to consumers about reports it has received concerning jerky pet treat-related illnesses involving 3,600 dogs and 10 cats in the U.S. since 2007. Approximately 580 of those pets have died.

Within hours of eating treats sold as jerky tenders or strips made of chicken, duck, sweet potatoes and/or dried fruit, some pets have exhibited decreased appetite, decreased activity, vomiting, diarrhea (sometimes with blood or mucus), increased water consumption, and/or increased urination.