



BEHAVIOR
SERIES

Dog Toys and How to Use Them

FOR DOGS AND OTHER ANIMAL COMPANIONS, toys are not a luxury, but a necessity. Toys help fight boredom in dogs left alone, and toys can even help prevent some problem behaviors from developing.

Although cats can be pretty picky when it comes to enjoying particular toys—ignoring a \$10 catnip mouse and marveling over a piece of crumpled newsprint—dogs are often more than willing to play with any object they can get their paws on. That means you'll need to be particularly careful when monitoring your dog's playtime to prevent any "unscheduled" activities.

"Safe" Toys

Many factors contribute to the safety or danger of a toy, and a number of them depend upon your dog's size, activity level, and preferences. Another factor is the environment in which your dog spends his time. Although we can't guarantee your dog's enthusiasm or his safety with any specific toy, we can offer the following guidelines.

Be Cautious

The things that are usually most attractive to dogs are often the very things that are the most dangerous. Dog-proof your home by safely storing string, ribbon, rubber bands, children's toys, pantyhose, and anything else that could be ingested.

Toys should be appropriate for your dog's size. Balls and other toys that are too small can easily be swallowed or become lodged in your dog's throat.

Avoid or alter any toys that aren't "dog proof" by removing ribbons, strings, eyes, or other parts that

could be chewed or ingested. Discard toys that start to break into pieces or have pieces torn off. You should also avoid "tug-of-war" games with dogs who have dominant personalities. (Such games between dogs are usually fine.)

Ask your veterinarian which rawhide toys are safe and which aren't. Unless your veterinarian says otherwise, "chewies" like hooves, pig's ears, and rawhides should only be played with under your supervision. Very hard rubber toys are safer and last longer.

Take note of any toy that contains a "squeaker" buried in its center. Your dog may feel that he must find and destroy the source of the squeaking, and he could ingest it—in which case squeaking objects should also be used under your supervision.

Check labels for child safety. Look for stuffed toys that are labeled as safe for children under three years of age and that don't contain any dangerous fillings. Problem fillings include things like nutshells and polystyrene beads, but even "safe" stuffings aren't truly digestible. Remember that soft toys are not indestructible, but some are sturdier than others. Soft toys should be machine washable.

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