



# Greater Androscoggin Humane Society

[www.SavingPetsinMaine.org](http://www.SavingPetsinMaine.org)

## **Why Do Dogs Chew & How to Combat Destructive Chewing**

First and foremost, dogs chew to explore. Everything is investigated with their nose and mouth. It is a normal activity for dogs of all ages to do and we must encourage it in healthy ways. Many times though, if they choose specific odorous objects, it is because they're attracted to the taste and smell. If your dog's favorite chew toy is shoes, it may also be because of the material (which oftentimes is leather) and may remind them of prey animals. Dogs who chew on furniture/wood may be reminded of sticks, etc. found outside. They don't understand the differences in materials that are good to chew and similar materials that are not ok to chew.

### **Common Chewing Causes:**

Boredom & lack of enrichment/mental stimulation  
Teething (puppy up until approximately 6 months of age)  
Separation anxiety  
Stress, anxiety, &/or frustration

Medical reasons (Hunger, deficiency, to alleviate pain in puppies & to clean teeth in adult dogs)  
They are just being curious normal dogs and puppies!

### **How to Combat Chewing:**

First rule out the reason for the chewing. Look at what your dog's daily life is like. Is there adequate enrichment, what is the dog's age, does the chewing happen predominately when the animal is alone, is the dog chewing when he is playing, etc. Next, here are some recommendations that may help to alleviate destructive chewing. If they don't seem to be enough and you believe other factors may be an issue, always contact your veterinarian and/or a behaviorist/trainer for further assistance. Always dog-proof your home to enable success in your household. If your dog likes to chew smelly items, shoes, etc. put them away. If furniture legs (as it reminds them of sticks etc.) are the object of choice, the use of veterinarian-approved deterrents often work wonders, and all in all, if your dog cannot be "trusted" to have free-roam of your home for any reason, gating, tethering, crating etc. will help as well.

If boredom seems to be the culprit, it is usually from lack of mental stimulation. Puppies, for example, usually live with their litter mates and mother until rehomed. After that, just like adult dogs, if they're the only dog in-home they can easily become bored if they only have us humans to entertain them. It is key to give them plenty of enrichment activities, nosework games, frozen Kongs & bones, training, toys, etc. as well as healthy, active playtime to keep their lives fully enriched mentally and physically.

Like human babies, teething occurs to help puppies curb the aching as adult teeth come in up until 6 months of age. (This behavior may start or stop at varying times dependent on puppy's

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rate of development.) Giving your puppy frozen ice cubes or frozen blocks, (an excellent enrichment tool as well -fill an empty Tupperware or small bucket using broth and/or bits of high value treats & kibble - also great on a hot summer day), filled frozen Kongs, or other frozen toys suitable for chewing may help alleviate the pressure and discomfort your puppy is feeling. Some people use frozen socks or wet washcloths as well but they should always be supervised to prevent ingestion.

Stress, anxiety, and/or frustration in all ages of dog is common. Some dogs will even start to chew sticks and grass at a dog park to alleviate stress and anxiety or grab an item and start shaking, tearing, or chewing it to help themselves relieve the above. If a dog also gets overstimulated during play they will start to do these things and may also nibble/nip your hand in play. They may also chew things up in their crate due to stress from separation anxiety, boredom, frustration, etc. Dogs will redirect energy to objects, their leash, and even people because they do not process thoughts like humans do and are trying to help themselves release them. It is important to look at the whole picture to help them avoid the stressors and anxiety in order to curb the undesirable behaviors. If your dog does show these behaviors and you can pinpoint when they occur/what causes it, try carrying a toy and/or treats and practice healthy training moments with them or offer them a toy instead.

Medical reasons should be diagnosed by your veterinarian. If it is due to a dietary deficiency, many times these behaviors will cease on their own once medically addressed. If they continue, then it may have become an established behavior and trying the other suggestions or seeking out a behaviorist/trainer may be of benefit to you/your dog.

Separation anxiety depending on the degree, etc. is a longer process and has other factors involved to help combat it. Sometimes the use of prescribed medications if safety is an issue may help and there are resources both online and on our website to give tips on separation anxiety as it is oftentimes not a simple fix.

Please note to never spank, yell, use force, etc. towards your dog. If the items were left out, the dog unattended, etc., it is our error as humans and not the animals. Dogs do not have the thought processes that we do and when they pick out your favorite shoe or broom handle, table leg etc. they are doing so for reasons that make perfect sense to them and they will not understand why they are being punished. This type of punishment does not encourage confidence and will many times damage the relationship that you have with your dog and instill fear in them.

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