

# Choosing the Right Dog Toys

Dog toys can provide fun, mental stimulation, and exercise for your dog. This greatly reduces stress due to confinement, isolation and/or boredom. For young, high-energy and untrained dogs, interactive play also offers an opportunity to learn about appropriate and inappropriate behavior with people and with other animals, like jumping up or being mouthy.

It's your job to ensure that the toys you give your dog are safe and appropriate for your dog. This can depend on factors such as your dog's size, activity level and personal preference. Although we can't guarantee your dog's enthusiasm or their safety with any specific toy, we can offer the following guidelines.

## What to Watch Out For

Dog-proof your home by checking for: string, ribbon, rubber bands, children's toys, pantyhose and anything else that could be ingested. Toys should be appropriate for your dog's current size. Balls and other toys that are too small can easily be swallowed or become lodged in your dog's mouth or throat. Avoid or alter any toys that aren't "dog-proof" by removing ribbons, strings, eyes or other parts that could be chewed and/or ingested. Also take note of any toy that contains a "squeaker" buried in its center. Your dog may feel that he must find and destroy the squeak-source and could ingest it.

"Chewies" like hooves, pig's ears and rawhides, should be supervision-only goodies. Very hard rubber or plastic toys, such as Nylabones, are safer and last longer. Use particular caution with toys you leave with a crated dog. Make sure the toy can hold up to your dog's level of chewing and inspect the toys frequently for damage, particularly for pieces that are about to come off.

With plush toys, watch for problem fillings like nutshells and polystyrene beads. Remember that soft toys are not indestructible and that even "safe" fillings shouldn't be eaten. Soft toys should be machine washable.

## Types of Toys We Recommend

Very hard rubber toys, like Nylabone-type products and Kong-type products, are fun for chewing and for carrying around. Make sure to get the right size for your dog.

Rope toys that are usually available in a "bone" shape with knotted ends.

Kong-type toys, especially when filled with broken-up treats or, even better, a mixture of broken-up treats and peanut butter (without added sugar, Xylitol, or fillers). The right size Kong can keep a puppy or dog busy for hours. Only by working diligently can your dog access the treats, and then only in small bits - very rewarding! To make it last even longer, fill the Kong and freeze before giving it to your dog. Double-check with your veterinarian about whether or not you should give peanut butter to your dog.

"Busy-box" or "puzzle" toys with hiding places for treats. Only by manipulating the toy with his nose, mouth and paws, can your dog access the goodies.

Soft stuffed toys are good for several purposes. For some dogs, the stuffed toy should be small enough to carry around. For dogs that want to shake or "kill" the toy, it should be the size that "prey" would be for that size dog (mouse-size, rabbit-size or duck-size). Some dogs also like to rip the stuffing out of stuffed toys so they should be monitored when playing with stuffed toys and stuffing should be picked up and discarded after your dog has had his fun with the toy. Even after a stuffed toy has been de-stuffed, your dog might still enjoy playing with the "skin" of the toy. Dogs that enjoy playing with the left-over "skins" of de-stuffed toys might also enjoy soft, un-stuffed toys, such as Skinneez.

## Get the Most Out of Dog Toys

Join in when your dog plays with his toys! Interactive play is very important for your dog because they need active "people time." Rotate your dog's toys weekly by making only four or five toys per dog available at a time. Keep a variety of types easily accessible. If your dog has a huge favorite, like a soft "baby," you should probably leave it out all the time.

Keep a large supply of dog toys available to rotate for your dog. Dogs are like small children in the same way that they get bored with their toys after only playing with them for a while. Consider purchasing new toys at least once a week for new dogs and puppies and at least once per month for older dogs. This will keep your toy selection fresh and it will be easier to sort through old toys and toss them out when they become worn.

"Hide and Seek" is a fun game for dogs to play. "Found" toys are often much more attractive than a toy which is blatantly introduced. Making an interactive game out of finding toys or treats is a good "rainy-day" activity for your dog, using up energy without the need for a lot of space.