

YOUR DOG NEEDS TO CHEW

Puppies and young dogs need something with resistance to chew on while their teeth and jaws are developing. It is important to have something available while they are cutting the puppy teeth, to assist in getting rid of the puppy teeth at the proper time, to help the permanent teeth through the gums, and to assure normal jaw development. The adult dog's desire to chew stems from the instinct for tooth cleaning effect, gum massage and jaw exercise - plus the need for an outlet for periodic doggie tensions! Tartar accumulates on the teeth of dogs, particularly at the gum line, more rapidly than on the teeth of humans. Most chewing by adult dogs is an effort to do something about this problem for themselves. It is important that dogs not be permitted to chew on anything they can break or bite large chunks from. Sharp pieces from a bone may pierce the intestine wall and kill. Pieces of cheap plastic, rubber, or pieces of rawhide chews can clog-up the stomach openings and/or intestines. These should be avoided. Pieces of rawhide chews are actually course leather and can lie in the stomach undigested for days and/or can get lodged in the intestines. Large baked knucklebones are excellent for large dogs. They provide hours of activity. The bone breaks down into bone meal and all that will be left is a small round piece. Take this away from the dog when it is too small for him to have safely. Avoid chewing on old shoes. The dog can't distinguish between good shoes and old ones!

Strong natural bones 2-8 inches in length of round shinbone from mature beef - the kind you get from the butcher - are best. Use these raw bones at 3 months old and after. Use for puppies from 8-16 weeks of age, but boil the bone first. (the baked shin and large knuckle bones at Pet Smart are excellent to use starting at 5 mo) After 6 months of age or as an adult, raw chicken bones (wings) can be used in the diet. These bones are soft and it is proven that these are healthy for the dog. Use Nyla-bone Products, the heavy-duty ones that can't be chewed up quickly and almost last forever. Some have nubs on them and come in various shapes and some are the "wolf" size. Always get a large size, never something fitting into the mouth easily. These Nylabones will be around a long time, especially after the dog is fully-grown. They are inexpensive considering how long they last. Kong toys are great for playing as well, and rarely get chewed up if you use the large very hard ones. Have your dog's teeth cleaned by a veterinarian when needed or do it yourself. You can purchase a small utensil that you can use yourself for removing the tartar. Yes, it's that easy.

Note*** We suggest never giving "raw-hide" bones/treats. These are long or big pieces of real hide or leather and they do not breakdown in the digestive system. Many operations have to be performed to remove these when stuck in the stomach or intestine.

Teething - Around 4 to 5 months of age, puppies will start to get their permanent teeth. There are several things you can do, both to ease the pain and control the chewing.

1. Make some chicken soup (low sodium variety or make it yourself) ice cubes and give them to the puppy.
2. Give him regular ice cubes to chew on.
3. Soften the kibble a bit with water.
4. Discourage biting on your arm or hand for comfort.

Puppies lose their teeth in a distinct pattern: first the small front teeth come out, then the premolars just behind the canines. Then the molars in the back come out (and you'll see adult molars behind those erupting as well). Finally the canine teeth come out. Sometimes the adult canines erupt before the baby canines have come all the way out. During this time, some discomfort, including bleeding gums is to be expected. Your puppy will want to chew more during this time, but it may also be too painful to do so. You won't see many of the baby teeth as puppies typically swallow them.

Puppy Biting

If you watch a litter of puppies playing, you will notice that they spend much of their time biting and grabbing each other with their mouths. This is normal puppy behavior. When you take a puppy from the litter and into your home, the puppy will still want to bite and mouth you. This is normal behavior, but needs to be modified so you and the puppy will be happy. Do not let the puppy work himself into a frenzy biting and barking. Stop him, make him sit and be quiet, then a good-boy pat on the chest when he's sitting quietly.

The first thing to teach your new puppy is that human flesh is much more sensitive than other puppies and that it really hurts us when they bite. This is called bite inhibition. A puppy has very sharp teeth and a weak jaw. This means that the puppy can cause you to be uncomfortable when mouthing or puppy biting you, but cannot cause severe damage. An adult dog has duller teeth and a powerful jaw. This means that an adult dog can cause significant damage when biting. **ANY DOG WILL BITE GIVEN THE RIGHT OR WRONG CIRCUMSTANCES!** If a small child falls on your adult dog and sticks a finger in the dog's eye, you should not be surprised if the dog bites. If you do a good job teaching your puppy bite inhibition, you should get a grab and release without damage. If you don't, you may get a hard bite with significant damage.

It is simple to teach a puppy bite inhibition. Every time the puppy touches you with its teeth, say "No" in a harsh tone of voice. Tell him to sit, push his little rump down, and then when he is quiet, pat him on the chest with a Good-boy... this patting is his reward for not biting. This should stop the grabbing with his mouth all together which is preferred. I don't believe in letting them ever mouth you, or it becomes bigger and harder as they get older and excited and this can easily startle a child and lead to other unwanted behavior. On occasion as he gets bigger or if he is fighting you over and over and not complying, then add this step—When you say No, and put him in the sit position, one hand is holding him up by the collar or leash, use the free hand to add a cuff up under his chin. This is the pattern – No, Sit and cuff up under the chin. This cuff is with an open hand and what it does is make his chin close quickly and he bits his tongue slight. Then make sure he stays sitting, then good boy on the chest. You will use this correction many times even as an adult. It is used for over barking, over aggressiveness with people or other animals, etc. It is an easy form of correction for the owner to accomplish and very humane on the dog as well. He has no choice but to quit his unwanted behavior, sit and behave. When the dog is bigger, apply a little of the lifting up by the leash till his front feet are off the ground slight, then the No, cuff, sit and good boy. This can be done in a public place if needed without alerting or upsetting spectators.

The commands necessary to teach a puppy NOT to mouth are easy and fun. Hold a small handful of the puppy's dry food, say "take it" in a sweet tone of voice, and give the puppy one piece of food. Then close the rest of the food in your hand and say "off" in that same sweet tone of voice. When the puppy has not touched your hand for 3 to 5 seconds, say, "take it" and give the puppy one piece of food. We are teaching the puppy that "off" means not to touch. You should do this with the puppy before every meal for at least 5 minutes.

After a couple of weeks of the above training, here is how you are going to handle puppy biting or mouthing: Expected mouthing (you see the puppy getting ready to mouth you): You say "OFF" before the puppy can mouth you. The puppy is mouthing you because of a desire to play. You have to answer the question, "Do I have time to play with the puppy now?" If you do, then do "sit", "down", "stand" or other positive 'lure and reward' training. If the answer is "No, I don't have time for the puppy, right now." then you do the quick correction listed above which is... (Every time the puppy touches you with its teeth, say –No, off--in a harsh tone of voice. Tell him to sit, push his little rump down, and then when he is quiet, pat him on the chest with a Good-boy...this patting is his reward for not biting).

This is the most asked question I get, **how do I stop my puppy from mouthing me?** Generally when most people take the puppy home they have allowed it to bite them, then as the newness of the puppy wears off they get annoyed at the biting and growling which generally accompanies the biting. They have already allowed the behavior to start now all of sudden they wanted it to stop. Puppies should never bite your hands, as you should never allow this behavior to start.

“No Bite”

Your pup is still a baby and the biting is very normal behavior for a puppy. Be assured that with proper training, it will subside. Below are a few recommendations on how you can help control this behavior and teach your pup a new command "NO BITE."

When a puppy goes to bite me, I grab the lower jaw firmly in my hand by placing my thumb under the tongue and wrapping my index finger under the chin. I then lightly push the jaw down and hold for 3 -5 seconds. While I do this, I tell the pup "NO BITE"

(Note- After holding the lower jaw open, you can also use lemon juice and squirt him in the mouth each time he bites and repeat NO BITE)

Then you can have the pup sit, and say “good boy, good boy” with a pat on the chest. Or instead of sitting, give the pup something he can chew on (ie a toy, a chew bone, etc--remember – no rawhides!). Give the object a little toss so he is interested in it instead of you to bite.

Typically, puppies HATE this correction. The lower jaw is hinged and you have control over them with this exercise. If the pup comes back again to bite, repeat the process only this time hold the lower jaw open a bit longer and again tell the pup in a firm voice "NO BITE". It takes time (and persistence) but soon the pup will start learning the NO BITE command and will stop biting when you issue it.

Now, remember they are retrievers and retrievers do everything with their mouths... so this behavior is not uncommon. You just have to teach what is acceptable to mouth (or bite) and what is not. It will take time -- it won't be an overnight process and EVERY person in the family needs to pick one way of handling it and be consistent. The important thing is to get the puppy to understand that he can't bite or mouth you, your hands, the kids' hands, their coat sleeves, etc. Do not let this unwanted go on for more than a few weeks or it will become a very bad habit and lead to real nipping and more when uncontrolled.

If the dog that you are teaching is bigger or older always along with the “No-Bite exercise put the dog into a sit position immediately after and reward when sitting still with a “good boy” and a pat on the chest. He has to know what neutral position he can go to in order to avoid the pressure on the mouth exercise.