

HELP, MY PUPPY IS CHEWING ON EVERYTHING!

The image of the sweet little puppy with a shoe in his mouth is only cute when it's not your shoe! Puppies and chewing go hand in hand. The household destruction looks the same, but the reasons for chewing are varied.

TEETHING

Just about everyone knows that puppies go through a teething stage. At about three months of age, the sharp little milk teeth begin to loosen and fall out. New, larger adult teeth cut through the gums and replace the baby teeth. At about six to seven months, the process is complete and a set of shiny white choppers are ready for action.

Teething is painful. The puppy wants to chew and gnaw on things to relieve his discomfort. Supply your puppy with several different types of chew toys and see which he likes best. Don't litter the floor with loads of toys; the puppy can become confused and think that anything on the floor is fair game and that's not the lesson you want to teach. Two or three toys is sufficient. Don't give him an old shoe or worn out sock to play with. He won't be able to tell the difference between old and new. You will be giving him the message that it's okay to destroy household objects.

Supervise the teething puppy; make sure his mouth stays on the toy and hasn't migrated over to the chair leg or flooring. When you can't supervise, confine the puppy to a small play area that he cannot damage. Gate off a portion of hallway or use a small kitchen or bathroom (do not close the door, use a tension gate across the doorway!) Spray baseboards and any cabinetry with an anti-chew product such as Bitter Apple; if the puppy tries to chew, the item will be horribly bitter tasting and he'll go back to the chew toy you left him.

If you don't have the extra space or don't want to take chances, get a puppy play pen or a kennel crate. This self contained space also assists with the housebreaking process and behavior problems associated with separation ("he only does it when I'm gone!") anxiety.

EXPLORATION AND LEARNING

Puppies use their mouths the way babies use their hands – to pick up an object and examine it thoroughly. Depending on what the object is, it may or may not survive the inspection. Again, supervision is key. You must be able to catch him in the act if you want him to learn what he cannot chew. Keep chew toys readily available. When you see the puppy about to pick up the wrong item, sharply warn him to LEAVE IT and offer him the toy in a warm inviting voice. If he doesn't accept your offer and returns to the wrong item, repeat the process. Don't give in. If necessary, put him on a leash and keep him with you for a while so he can't sneak off back to the forbidden object.

UNDER-EXERCISED/BORED

If your puppy chews non-stop or you come home from work to a ransacked apartment, make sure that you are meeting your dog's need for exercise. Dogs that are bored and under-exercised "get it out of their system" by digging, barking,

pacing and tearing or chewing. No amount of training can replace exercise.

Activity levels are based upon your dog's age, breed type, diet and exercise. Puppies by nature are more active than their adult counterparts. Very young puppies (under 10 weeks of age) can sleep 16-18 hours a day; puppies over three months of age sleep less and play more. Terriers and sporting dogs have high activity levels; working dogs are more moderate in their need for exercise.

Under-exercised dogs need to "blow off some steam"; they are wild and difficult to train. Make certain that your pup is thoroughly exercised before you leave for an extended period of time (5+ hours). Don't force the pup into a frenzied day of chewing and trashing because you didn't have time to take him for a long brisk walk or run in the park.

If all these methods fail, consult a behavioral specialist or experienced trainer.