



Dental Chew Toys and Treats

There are many products available as chews and treats for dogs (and cats) on the market. With all the options available, it can be difficult to determine which are safe and effective for your pet. These are guidelines that can help you decide which is more appropriate for you and your pet. Regardless of which chews and treats you decide to give, you should always supervise your pet while they are playing with them to make sure that they are not ingesting large pieces, or injuring themselves with the treat.

Dog Chews to Avoid

For dental health, any chew toy that you give to your dog should be somewhat soft and flexible. Otherwise, they can and will break a tooth, or lacerate their oral soft tissues and gums on hard, inflexible objects. For instance, Bully Sticks, Antlers, Hooves, Rolled, Knotted or Compressed Rawhides, and Nylabones are all marketed for dog dental health, but all have been documented to cause dental fractures. Dental injury can turn that \$5 chew toy into a much more expensive extraction or root canal procedure. If you can't hit yourself in the knee without pain, or leave a thumb print in the toy with your fingernail, then it is too hard for your dog. This includes animal bones, which not only can cause tooth fractures, but can also cause painful gastrointestinal injury, as these are hard, can form sharp fragments, and are indigestible.

Only with Supervision

Rawhides are an example of a dental chew that have been shown to be beneficial for a dog's dental health, but can also cause GI blockages and irritation if ingested too quickly. Though many dogs will do fine with rawhide chews, it's important to supervise your pet while they are eating a rawhide to make sure they don't gulp down large pieces. Some types of rawhide are specially designed by vets with safety and digestibility in mind, like Tartar Shield soft rawhide chews for dogs, and CET chews for dogs. If you think this may be appropriate for your dog, look for a brand that is reputable, and does not use harsh chemicals to treat the rawhide.

Digestible Dog Chews

There are many chews on the market today that are considered safer for dogs because they are digestible and not too hard for teeth. Digestible chews have been designed for increased safety. The downside is that they don't last very long and tend to be more expensive. To save money, try balancing

between chew toys and edible chews. Aggressive chewers might do well with something like a food-filled Kong toy in addition to a digestible chews.

Flavored dental chews like Greenies are made of digestible ingredients like wheat gluten, corn starch and meat or poultry meal. Though completely edible, these ingredients are not ideal for some dogs, such as those on a strict diet due to allergies or owner preference. It is important to offer the size of Greenies that is appropriate for the body weight of the dog because these are designed for the bite strength of each weight group. Other examples of these types of chews that have good research showing they work include HealthiDent Bright Bites, Virbac VeggieDent chews and Milk-Bone Brushing Chews.

Chew Toys

There are many different brands of chew toys available, as well as multiple shapes, textures, and sizes. What you choose to give your dog will depend on what your dog likes to play with. There are several good brands of toys that are available, but the most important thing is to choose a toy that will not cause your pet harm to their teeth or overall health. Choose toys that are flexible, that can be indented with a fingernail, and are not so hard that they can break a tooth. Some brands that make these types of toys include Kongs, Goughnuts, and WestPaws. If your dog likes tennis balls be sure to get “Dog-Safe” versions, otherwise the abrasive coating on tennis balls can cause severe wear of the teeth.

Remember that there is no one chew that is right for every dog. For overweight dogs or those with sensitive stomachs, it may be best to stick with chew toys. For healthy but selective dogs, you might need to try a few different types of chews before you discover what works best for your dog. Overall healthy and non-discerning dogs will probably enjoy a little bit of everything. Just make sure no treat or chew makes up more than about 10% of your dog's diet.

The chews that were mentioned in this handout are all approved by the Veterinary Oral Health Council, which means that they have been proven to reduce plaque and/or tartar in 2 separate independent studies. The full list of approved products can be found on their website at www.VOHC.org and is a credible source for dog and cat dental products.