

Dog Toys - How They Help Keep Pets Healthy

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Puppies and dogs, like children, are delighted when you bring them a new toy. There are hundreds of dog toys to choose from, with new ones manufactured each month. Toys not only add entertainment to your dog's life, they can also intellectually challenge your pet, feature in interactive play between you and your pet, and even help clean your pet's teeth while she plays!

How toys help

Toys provide your puppy or dog with appropriate objects to chew on, thus decreasing destructive behavior in your home. Puppies especially are inclined to chew as they use their mouths to examine everything! Chewing behavior increases when puppies are about four months to 12 months old and go through teething. Soft plush toys are great for puppies to teethe on. A favorite can become a security blanket for the pup when he has bedded down for the night. Soft plush toys are usually light enough to carry, soft enough to chew on and machine washable for easy cleaning. Older dogs may also enjoy plush toys. Some plush toys come with squeakers inside that many dogs enjoy. If you need to board or kennel your pet, ask if a favorite toy can come along so your pet has a familiar plaything while away from home.

Keeping teeth clean and healthy

A number of dog toys encourage your pet to chew to help clean teeth and massage gums. Some of these items are flavored for your pet's added enjoyment. These toys are designed to provide maximum contact with the surfaces of each tooth, reducing plaque and removing food particles. Rope toys allow the teeth to sink into the strands as they gently rub the surfaces of the teeth. Gently engage in tug of war with your dog. He will bite down on the rope, tighten his grip and floss his teeth while he plays!

Toys for interactive play

Toys that are designed for interactive play between you and your dog include tug toys, rope toys, balls and Frisbees. Dogs love to interact with their people, and these toys provide hours of quality play time. Certain breeds, like those in the Retriever group, enjoy fetching balls, and many would fetch for hours if allowed! Some toys are specifically designed to float, so you can combine swimming with retrieving if your dog loves the water. Other breeds, like Shetland Sheepdogs and Australian Shepherds, enjoy chasing and catching Frisbee-type toys. Frisbees come in a variety of styles and materials, from tough nylon ones to glow-in-the-dark ones, to softer cloth Floppy Discs. Some cloth ones can be converted into a water dish for your pet! Scented toys are attractive to some dogs, and you can even use them to play "hide and seek" indoors with your pet on a rainy day. Reserve special interactive toys for those times you and your pet play together.

Engaging your pet's mental abilities

Certain toys have been created to engage your pet's mental abilities. Highly intelligent dogs who may become bored with conventional toys find these products mentally stimulating. One such toy has hidden recesses in it where you can stash dog kibble or pieces of food, such as carrots. As your dog tumbles the toy around and plays with it, a piece of food drops out, rewarding your dog for her efforts. I've recommended placing a mixture of peanut butter and sliced carrots inside a hard rubber Kong toy to encourage pets to play with it. The positive food reward makes these toys very attractive to dogs. Owners like the toys because they are virtually indestructible.

Tip: Make sure the toy's right

Offering too many toys at once can overwhelm your pet. Try rotating your dog's toys every three or four weeks. This way your dog thinks she's getting new toys!

Monitor your dog's toys frequently. Check for wear and tear or small pieces that can be chewed off and swallowed. Rope toys should be replaced when they become frayed.

Check sizes of toys carefully. Very small balls could be swallowed and obstruct your pet's intestine. Worse, the ball might get caught in a dog's throat and choke him. If in doubt, always purchase a larger size toy.

Avoid realistic toys. If the toy looks like a sock or a shoe, your dog might not see the difference between her toy and your expensive athletic wear!

As social animals, dogs love to play with each other, with their toys and with you, their owner. Dogs and puppies are delighted when you offer them a brand new toy. Their excitement and appreciation will certainly make your day