

Toys Strongly Advised Against Giving to Your Pet

Whether you have a dog or a cat, this type of toy (bought or homemade) can be swallowed, causing great damage to your pet's GI tract. Another can catch your pet's tongue. And watch out for these common makeshift toys — some could lead to suffocation and others present a significant choking hazard.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Choose toys that are the right size for your dog; larger toys for larger dogs, smaller toys for smaller dogs
- Avoid toys that can be chewed into small, inhalable pieces or those with sharp points or edges
- Let your dog play with long rope-like or tug toys under supervision only, as they could become wrapped around your dog's neck
- Pet toys are not regulated, so they can be made with virtually any material (including those that contain toxic chemicals)
- Choose toys made in the U.S. out of 100% natural rubber, organic cotton or other non-toxic materials, and which have no chemical smell

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Pets in the U.S. are lovingly spoiled, averaging 34 toys each, according to one survey of more than 100 pet owners.¹ Your dog may have one or two favorites, or he may choose a new No. 1 depending on his mood, but one thing's for certain — most dogs love to play with toys.

If your dog is new to your home, offer him a variety of toys — tugs, balls, Frisbees, chew toys, squeakers, stuffed options, and more — and you'll quickly learn his favorites.

Since many pet stores allow pet visitors, you can even take your dog with you down the toy aisle and see which ones seem to pique his interest.

You'll want to pick and choose carefully, however, as not all toys on the market are safe for dogs or safe for your dog. Your dog's temperament, size and age all play a part in determining which toys are safe, and there are considerations, too, based on the toy itself (material, brand, shape and more).

Toys are meant to be fun above all else, so use the tips that follow, compiled by Vet Street, to ensure the toys you choose for your dog keep him not only happily playing, but also safe.²

Toy Safety Tips for Adult Dogs

Size and shape considerations:

- Choose toys that are the right size for your dog. Giving a small toy to a large dog poses a risk of inhalation and choking. Small balls are especially dangerous, as they can easily become lodged in your dog's trachea.
- Generally speaking, you should choose large toys for large dogs and smaller toys only for smaller dogs.
- Avoid toys that have small parts that can be chewed or pulled off.
- Avoid toys with sharp edges or that can be chewed into sharp points.
- Be careful letting your dog play with sticks. Avoid sticks that have sharp ends and choose one that is too long or too short for your dog to jab onto the ground when carried vertically (like a straw), as this could impale your dog's mouth.
- When playing fetch, avoid toys that are overly heavy or hard, which might damage your pet's teeth or injure him.
- If your dog likes to de-stuff toys, be sure he's not eating the stuffing. Some dogs really enjoy stuffing-free toys, which you can purchase "skin only" or make yourself by removing the fluff.

These items should not be used as toys:

- Dogs should not play with strings, ribbons, pantyhose, socks or rubber bands. These objects may be swallowed and can cause life-threatening complications once in the digestive tract.
- Do not give your dog children's toys (such as stuffed animals), as they're not designed for dogs.
- Avoid any toys that are stuffed with beads or beans.
- Do not give your dog containers large enough for him to put his head in. If his head becomes stuck, he will be unable to get free and may suffocate.
- If your dog has neck or back problems, such as herniated disks, avoid playing with tug toys.
- Rubber toys with a hole in only one end may form a vacuum that catches your dog's tongue. Dispose of such toys or poke a hole in the other end so a vacuum cannot form.
- Rawhide chews aren't recommended for a number of reasons, one of which is because they pose a high risk of choking and intestinal obstruction.

If you opt to offer rawhides to your dog, you should supervise chewing sessions closely.

Use these toys only under close supervision:

- Let your dog play with long rope-like or tug toys under supervision only, as they could become wrapped around your dog's neck.
- If your dog likes to play "rip out the squeaky," offer such toys only when you can safely monitor his play.
- Be careful with toys that require batteries. Your dog may chew them out and swallow them.
- Do not let your dog play with rocks.
- Be careful with tennis balls. They can be a choking hazard for large dogs, and the abrasive fuzz may wear down teeth if your dog is an aggressive or persistent chewer (normal play will not pose a risk to your dog's teeth).

- Be careful with toys, such as Frisbees, that may cause your dog to jump up and twist simultaneously. Such movements may lead to leg and back injuries.

Some Toys May Contain Toxic Chemicals

Another aspect of toys' safety is what the toy is made from. Pet toys are not regulated, so they can be made with virtually any material. Plastic toys, in particular, can be dangerous, as many contain endocrine-disrupting chemicals such as phthalates and bisphenol-A (BPA).

In one study, researchers found that old or weathered toys (such as those left outside) leached higher concentrations of the harmful chemicals.³

While BPA-free toys are available, the BPA may be replaced with similarly (or more) toxic chemicals, including bisphenol-S (BPS), so this, unfortunately, is not a reliable indicator of toy safety. Other toxins sometimes found in dog toys include heavy metals (lead, etc.) and formaldehyde.

When looking for new toys, choose those made in the U.S. out of 100% natural rubber, organic cotton or other non-toxic materials. The sniff test is recommended to start with: toys should have no smell. If the toy smells strongly of chemicals, put it back.

The best toys for pets are usually handmade, by individuals or very small companies and found at local farmer's markets or sold regionally in upscale pet boutiques. There are some great, all-natural toys you can also find online, if you go searching.

How to Bring New Life Back to Old Toys

As any pet parent knows, dogs can quickly tire of the same-old toys sitting in their toy bin. The novelty factor is huge in peaking your dog's interest. A study published in *Animal Cognition* found that dogs preferred to sniff or pick up a novel toy, instead of ones they'd already played with in 38 out of 50 cases.⁴

The average U.S. pet owner spends nearly \$50 a year on toys, according to the 2015 to 2016 American Pet Products Association (APPA) National Pet Owners Survey.⁵ So, how can you avoid doubling or tripling that amount because your dog so quickly tires of his "old" toys?

Put them on a rotation! Leave out one or two toys out and put the rest away. In a day or two, swap them out and watch your pet's excitement begin anew. You can even try adding a new scent to the toy, such as by rolling it in leaves, to further entice your dog.

Another trick is to interact with your dog using the toy. Suddenly, the stuffed goose that once just sat in the corner is up and flying through the air or making quacking sounds! Your dog will probably be delighted, and you'll save money on toys, while spending some quality bonding time with your dog. It's a win all around!

Sources and References

¹ [Trupanion March 8, 2013 \(Archived\)](#)

² [VetStreet, July 30, 2014](#)

³ [Discovery News December 11, 2012](#)

⁴ [Animal Cognition July 2008, Volume 11, Issue 3, Pages 553-556](#)

⁵ [American Pet Products Association, Total U.S. Pet Industry Expenditures](#)
