

## How to Choose Safe Dog Toys

**The size, materials, and design of your dog's toys matter when it comes to her safety.**

*By Maureen Kochan*

Boredom-busting, tooth-cleaning, and — deadly? Yes, some dog toys may actually harm more than they help, says Megan Whelan, DVM, of the emergency and critical care unit at Angell Animal Medical Center in Boston. If your dog loves toys (and whose doesn't?), check out these tips for choosing the safest ones for her:

1. Judge a dog toy by its cover. Some dogs can shred cuddly, fabric-covered dog toys in minutes. "If the toy has small parts or stuffing, the dog could ingest hazardous materials and face a possible blockage of its airway or intestines," Whelan says. Give your dog sturdy rubber dog toys or bones if she tends to destroy soft toys.
2. Size does count. Some large dogs can swallow small dog toys whole, Whelan says. A good rule is to match the toy's size to the size of your dog's potential prey, e.g., get a gopher-size dog toy for an Irish Terrier, or a duck-size toy for a Golden Retriever.
3. Less is more. Dog toys with decorative eyes, strings, decals, or other embellishments that can break off can be deadly, Whelan says. It's best to avoid them rather than trying to remove the embellishments, which could further damage the dog toy and make it even more unsafe.
4. Stick to toys made for dogs. Children's toys — especially ones made for kids younger than 3 years old — aren't sturdy enough for rough dog play.
5. Discard worn toys. Toys that have sat outside in the sun, rain, or other elements should be discarded. Also, toss toys that show wear or have any broken or tattered elements, Whelan says.
6. Check with your vet regarding rawhide or other soft chew treats. Some vets don't recommend giving dogs rawhide or other soft chews, while others say they're OK, as long as she enjoys them under your watchful eye.

Maureen Kochan is a DOG FANCY contributing editor.