

How to Pick Safe Edible Chews for Your Dog

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If you've ever lost a shoe to your dog's teeth, you know how much [dogs love to chew](#). It relieves the pain of [teething](#), exercises jaw muscles, and [cleans teeth](#). Chewing is also great for [beating doggy boredom](#) and can help your dog [relieve anxiety](#) or frustration by giving them something enjoyable to focus on. Thankfully, there are all kinds of [chew toys](#) on the market; however, edible chews are some of the most exciting. How do you know which ones are safe for your dog? This guide to choosing the perfect chew will help you sort through the options.

Know Your Dog

Every dog has their own chewing style. For example, a [Boxer](#) is more likely to be an aggressive chewer than a [Shih Tzu](#). And every dog has their own chewing preferences. Some dogs like a harder chew and others prefer something with more give. Plus, as your dog ages, their preferences can change. The tough chews your dog enjoys as an adolescent will likely be too hard when they become a [senior dog](#) with dental issues.

Pick chews that suit your dog's personality, age, and chewing style. What is safe for one dog might not be a good choice for another. Just because something is labelled edible, it doesn't mean it's safe. For example, if your dog breaks off large chunks and swallows them whole, that could lead to serious complications like choking or an [obstructed bowel](#). Whenever you give your dog a new type of chew, always observe them to be sure it's a safe choice.

What to Look for in a Safe Chew

The following list will help you choose an appropriate chew:

- **Hardness.** Chews that are too hard can crack your dog's teeth or lacerate their gums.
- **Durability.** The chew should be strong enough to withstand vigorous chewing. If it's too soft, your dog can break off chunks and swallow them whole which is a health hazard.

- Long-lasting. Look for chews that will last as long as possible to keep your dog occupied and to go easy on your wallet.
- Size. Chews that are too small for your dog present a choking risk. Pick items that are large enough to prevent your dog from getting the entire thing in their mouth at once.
- Ingredients. Look for limited, natural ingredients and avoid any flavorings/coatings that could upset your dog's stomach.

If you have any concerns about your choice of chews, consult your veterinarian.



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Here are some of the more common chews:

Rawhide

Rawhide, which is made from the inner layer of horse or cowhide, is a popular chew, but [rawhide safety](#) depends on the dog. Power chewers can break off large pieces. If your dog swallows these chunks, they can choke on them, or the piece can become lodged in their intestines.

Rawhide is also difficult to digest. Pieces will pass through the digestive system whole, which is why they are such an obstruction risk. If you choose to provide rawhide, prevent your dog from eating large pieces by removing any chunks as soon as your dog breaks them off, and once the entire rawhide has been chewed down small enough to swallow in one piece, take it away from your dog.

Bully Sticks

Unlike rawhide, [bully sticks](#), sometimes known as pizzle sticks, are easily digested. A single-ingredient chew made from beef muscle, bully sticks range in thicknesses and lengths. They also come braided and shaped for an extra-long chew. They do not splinter. Instead, the end of the stick becomes soft and acts like a toothbrush as your dog chews.

Most dogs simply gnaw the end of the stick, but power chewers might bite straight through producing large pieces that pose a choking risk. Or your dog might swallow the entire stick whole. In that case, you can try placing the treat in a bully stick holder which prevents your dog from breaking off too much at once. When your dog has chewed the stick down to a nub, take it away before they can swallow what's left.

Antlers

[Antlers are an all-natural chew](#) that can come from a variety of animals like deer or elk. They come in [a range of sizes and shapes](#) and are incredibly long-lasting because they are so hard, but that very quality can make them a risky choice. Dogs can break their teeth on antlers which is not only painful but expensive to treat. The hard surface can also cut your dog's gums. But the greatest risk is from a shard of antler that splinters off. These shards can puncture or get stuck in your dog's mouth, throat, or intestines leading to emergency surgery. Many veterinarians recommend avoiding antlers, but if you do provide them, always supervise your dog while they chew.



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Yak Cheese Chews

A relatively new chew on the scene is the [yak cheese chew](#). These hard blocks of dried cheese are made from just a few ingredients – yak’s milk (and sometimes cow’s milk), salt, and lime juice. The lactose content is low, so dogs generally digest them well, and they are hard enough to be long-lasting. Plus, they don’t smell as bad as some other animal-based chews.

However, the same dangers lurk with these chews. If your dog breaks off chunks, they can swallow them and risk choking or obstruction. Also, although these are cheese, they are quite hard and could lead to broken teeth. As with other chews, only give your dog a block large enough that they can’t fit it all in their mouth at once and take it away as soon as it gets small enough to pose a hazard.

Tendons and Other Animal Parts

From [trachea](#) to [pig ears](#), all kinds of animal parts are marketed as edible dog chews. Some are safer than others. Pig ears are often coated which can upset your dog’s stomach. Backstrap and other tendon chews are a safer choice not to mention low in fat and high in protein and collagen. Trachea is a softer chew that contains chondroitin and glucosamine, so it can be a good choice for a dog with joint issues. Finally, fish skin

chews are shaped into bones or rolls and although they smell fishy, they are a great source of omega three fatty acids.

Human-Made Edible Bones

There are a whole range of [human-made edible bones available](#). Often called dental bones, these are usually designed to clean teeth. Look for a version that is highly digestible with natural ingredients. And choose a bone size and shape appropriate for your dog's size.