

SELECTING THE BEST TOYS FOR YOUR DOG

In 2007, Oprah Winfrey received a great deal of sympathy, from the pet owners of America, when her Golden Retriever choked to death on a common play "toy" - a ball. If you are like me, your dog's toy box is full of cute, cuddly toys with and without squeaky's, an assortment of balls, rope tugs and many, many, many other types of toys too. Most pet owners are not aware of the potential dangers we are subjecting our pets to with the selection of some of these toys and there is no help out there for us either. Like me, most pet owners that I know, regard their pets as they do their children. Many regulatory agencies evaluate and monitor the safety of toys that are sold for children such as the Consumer Product Safety Commission, W.A.T.C.H., and Toy Association etc. These agencies also alert us to dangers so that these toys are not sold for our children. The latest being the lead content of toys made in China. Surprisingly, there are no such regulatory agencies monitoring the quality and content of pet toys. Therefore, it is up to us to educate ourselves on the best toy choices for our pets.

The following are some general guidelines that I use for selecting toys for my precious lab, Rhoda.

- **Size.** This is tricky. Last year the Veterinary Practice News published an article entitled "They Ate What?" In that article they told a story of a 1-year old boxer who ate 208 1-3" sized rocks. Do not worry, after vomiting a few, his owners took him to the vet who extracted the rocks and Boxer is fine today. One rock was actually three inches in diameter! A tennis ball is 2 ½ inches in diameter. And as in the case of Oprah's Golden, the dog loved to play catch with tennis balls. Tennis balls get really wet and slimy after a good game of catch. A slimy tennis ball can slip down a big dog's throat in a heartbeat. So, now we can clearly see the issues with tennis balls. Tennis balls are certainly small enough to be swallowed either purposely or by accident. I have removed all tennis balls from Rhoda's toy box. Instead, I have replaced them with other soft rubber balls such as the Hol-ee Roller(TM), clutch balls and Frisbees. I have never read a case where a dog swallowed a Frisbee.
- **Material.** I have found that the material I select has a lot to do with the breed of dog. For example, Rhoda does best with canvas material. Canvas is tougher than other soft cushy material. She can safely chew the canvas without destroying the toy or ingesting the material. Then again, my girlfriend's 15 lb. Havanese loves oversized cushy toys and does just fine with them as long as they do not have a squeaker. Hard and soft rubber toys are usually the best choice overall. They come in a variety of sizes, shapes and colors. Some can be filled with peanut butter or treats for those times when you want your pet distracted safely for a good deal of time. Best case is to see how your dog does with different materials and determine the safety of each type of toy for yourself.
- **Squeakers & Rattles.** Some dogs will chew a toy relentlessly in an effort to get to the squeaker or rattle. While dogs playing with toys that make noise are fun to watch (it's fun to hear too) dogs can easily chock on squeaker or rattle. Watch your dog closely in order to determine what he will do with a freed squeakers or rattle.
- **Chews.** In the same article, "They Ate What?" is a story about a pit bull mix that swallowed an 11" carving knife. Like the boxer, the owners acted fast, a vet extracted the knife and the dog is fine today. Before I read this story, I used to give Rhoda nylon bones of various sizes and shapes. Nylon bones, just like the tennis balls, become slippery. One the ends are chewed off, these bones can easily slide right down a dogs throat just like that carving knife. Consequently, I do not buy them nor do I recommend them. Then I decided to try rawhides. No luck with these either. The first hazard with rawhide comes when dogs swallow large chunks of it. These large chunks can cause blockages and unpleasant and costly trips to the vet. The second hazard comes from the curing of the rawhide itself. If your pet does well with rawhides, make sure to only buy American cured products that are formaldehyde free.

If you are like me, you will continue to purchase toys for your beloved friend. My final suggestion is to select the type of toy you want to provide for your dog and then purchase the next size up. Then watch your pet's reaction to the toys noticing any activity that may be a potential hazard. These suggestions have helped me select the best toys and I hope they are helpful to you as well.

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Article Source: <http://EzineArticles.com/895382>

