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The Dangers of Rawhide Dog Chew Toys

The downside of rawhide

By Sheila Pell

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"I *never* buy at Wal-Mart, I only buy organic and *nothing* from China, *ever*!"

This is how Danielle Devereux, whose German Shepherd Sammy is a ravenous consumer of snacks, describes her treat-buying strategy. Sammy prefers his rawhide toys soaked in warm chicken broth first. "As you can guess, he's a little bit spoiled."

In Devereux's remarks, I hear echoes of my own long search for the right dog chew toys.

From the time my Shepherd was a wee pup,

we combed the pet aisles looking for enticing substitutes for couch and chair leg. She quickly sniffed out her favorite section among the knuckle and femur bones: the bins where the rawhide is cached.

Promoted as an "all natural" treat, rawhide does keep dogs entertained, perhaps even more so in its many basted, twisted, even brightly colored mutations. It's the equivalent of that gummy-worm-fortified cereal made with real oats that children howl for all the way down the breakfast aisle. Those looking to improve on the bone are like the clever marketers who expertly tune a child's whining pitch. Your dog would like to convince you that rawhide is primal therapy for his carnivorous soul!

But if rawhide manufacturers were held to the same standards as drug makers, they'd be forced to add an equally long list of warnings to their labels: May cause stomach torsion, choking, vomiting, diarrhea, salmonella poisoning and exposure to various chemical residues.

The closer you look at the rawhide gravy train—its tentacles in China, typically, at one point or another—the more you may want to wean your dog off this dubious by-product.

The Dose Makes the Poison

"The most potent compounds for stimulating the taste buds in dogs, and presumably wolves, are amino acids that taste sweet to humans"—so goes the discussion of canid diet in *Wolves*, edited by David Mech and Luigi Boitani. Judging by an explosion of patents for flavored rawhide, which include "tastes" such as bubble-gum and hickory, chew-chefs have apparently done their research. However, in creating treats dogs will chomp for hours, they've also produced potentially more toxic products. The more dogs lick, chew and swallow the material, the greater their exposure to any contaminants it contains.

In the case of bubble-gum flavoring alone, the Material Safety Data Sheet reveals a toxic confection containing the carcinogen FD&C Red 40, along with preservatives like sodium benzoate. But tracking the effects of chemical exposure is nearly impossible when it's a matter of slow, low-dose poisoning. The FDA's veterinary branch, the [Center for Veterinary Medicine](#), checks into pet food additives only after numerous complaints about a particular chemical.

While chews made from rawhide, bone or other animal parts are consumable, and are therefore considered

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"food" under FDA law, as long as the label contains no reference to nutritional value (such as "high protein"), the agency advises that manufacturers "may not have to follow the AAFCO pet food regulations."

Producing rawhide begins with the splitting of an animal hide, usually from cattle. The top grain is generally tanned and made into leather products, while the inner portion, in its "raw" state, goes to the dogs. Removing the hair from hides often involves a highly toxic recipe: sodium sulphide liming. A standard practice is to procure rawhide in the "split lime state" as by-products from tanneries, facilities that top the list of U.S. Superfund sites. In the post-tannery stage, hides are washed and whitened using a solution of hydrogen peroxide. And that's just one step.

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BigWhiteDog · 2 years ago

It would be nice if there were some test results instead of hyperbole. How about showing what chemicals do actually show in these things instead of a lot of scare, lots of emotion grabbing and little facts.

28 ^ | v · [Reply](#) · [Share](#) ›

Deanna Szuter → **BigWhiteDog** · a year ago

I worked at the Tandy Leather Company in Austin, Texas. We had signs up, and specifically told customers our raw hyde was not to be used as chew toys because of all the chemicals our company uses in the tanning process. So, how about Googling this stuff yourself, instead of barking at people who are telling you the truth. Go ahead, call a Tandy store and ask them what the list of chemicals are in a piece of raw hyde.

23 ^ | v · [Reply](#) · [Share](#) ›

David Root → **Deanna Szuter** · 3 months ago

Indeed, rawhide in a tannery would be unsafe to even handle without proper protective gear, as it undergoes a very caustic process to remove the hair. You certainly wouldn't want to grab a piece off the line and give it to your dog. But, once shipped to the dog-chew toy factory -- and possibly even prior to shipping -- it would be further processed, including washing, to remove any residual caustic material.

2 ^ | v · [Reply](#) · [Share](#) ›

Randy Dockery → **Deanna Szuter** · 7 months ago

it is on the person making the claims to prove the claims. saw exactly what the OP saw. zero facts but a lot of fear mongering

3 ^ | v · [Reply](#) · [Share](#) ›

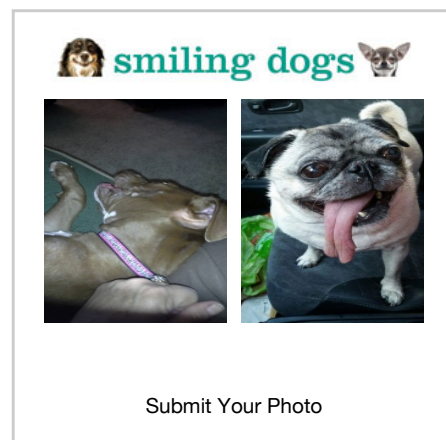
ManlyMan → **Randy Dockery** · 4 months ago

You must be pretty ill-informed on the topic then. I've known for 10 yrs not to give rawhide. If you feel you have to give rawhide, make sure it's from USA, at least it will have LESS chemicals than imported poison I mean rawhide does.

1 ^ | v · [Reply](#) · [Share](#) ›

Randy Dockery → **ManlyMan** · 4 months ago

and again, making claims without the proof. if you are going to make a claim, site references. i am not saying one is better or worse than the other but at least site a reference if you are going to make a claim. it is the simplest and first rule of science. show your work





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Other poisonous residues that may show up in rawhide include arsenic and formaldehyde. Even dog skin is a possibility. An ongoing investigation of the fur trade by Humane Society International, an arm of the HSUS, resulted in [this information](#), as listed on their website: “In a particularly grisly twist, the skins of brutally slaughtered dogs in Thailand are mixed with other bits of skin to produce rawhide chew toys for pet dogs. Manufacturers told investigators that these chew toys are regularly exported to and sold in U.S. stores.”

Back to the Factory (Farm)

There's no knowing where it's been, and where it begins is also unsettling. Rawhide is a by-product of the CAFO—or concentrated animal feeding operation, the bucolic term for today's industrial farm.

"Nasty, brutish and short" is how Ken Midkiff, author of *The Meat You Eat*, describes the life of the animals who give up their hides. He's no expert on rawhide, but Midkiff says he knows far more than he cares to about CAFOs, where thousands of "sentient beings," crammed together inside huge metal buildings, "never see the light of day until the truck comes to pick them up for slaughter."

"There's also a major problem with various drugs," he adds, citing a CAFO cocktail of antibiotics, arsenicals and hormones used to boost production. "While the claim is made that these don't remain in the meat of hogs or beef, that claim has not been tested by any federal agency."

Pattie Boden, owner of [The Animal Connection](#) in Charlottesville, Va., where organic toy enthusiasts shop, doesn't carry rawhide. Instead, she stocks free-range chews, [bully sticks](#), and organic raw bones, from shins to lamb necks. Her purchasing-protocol (and philosophy) is one owners might apply in their own search for healthful treats.

"I'm not going to be the most financially successful pet store," Boden says, "but I feel confident in the products I select, and I can sleep at night."

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Sheila Pell is a journalist and contributor to *The Bark*.

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BigWhiteDog · 2 years ago

It would be nice if there were some test results instead of hyperbole. How about showing what chemicals do actually show in in these things instead of a lot of scare, lots of emotion grabbing and little facts.

Donk, Choro.



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and first rule of science. Show your work

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Jesra Renee → Randy Dockery • 10 days ago

Rawhide from overseas has been shown to test positive for rat poison that was used during shipping to prevent the bones from being harmed. Other countries don't have strict regulations and these countries use arsenic-based products as preservatives and bleaching chemicals in the ultra-white rawhide treats. If you want reference, a study done by the Departments of Animal Sciences at the University of Illinois and Purdue University states that "Rawhide chews were only 70% digested after 6 hour gastric + 18 hour small intestinal digestion. Gastric digestion at 12 and 18 hours did not result in further improvement in rawhide digestibility." No, that's not about chemicals, that's about how it's legitimately just a terrible product to give your dogs.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

ManlyMan → Randy Dockery • 3 months ago

I'm not here to do your work for you. If you want to endanger YOUR dog with that poison, go ahead. And it's CITE a reference genius.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Randy Dockery → ManlyMan • 3 months ago

no work is required. you are making a claim and cant back it up

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Jordan Marie Smith → Randy Dockery • 3 months ago

in act he did back it up by saying he worked at a leather company, which is where rawhide is made. "We had signs up, and specifically told customers our raw hyde was not to be used as chew toys because of all the chemicals our company uses in the tanning process." are you blind? or just stubbornly stupid?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Randy Dockery → Jordan Marie Smith • 3 months ago

i worked at that same plant as his supervisor. could you link some sort of facts?

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Steve Cook → Deanna Szuter • 14 days ago

BigWhiteDog is right, I am so sick of hear say, blabber, and gossip. Data and facts, science, details, analysis. Just because your leather factory was unclean and used bad chemicals does not mean all do, nor does it mean that neutralizers or similar chemicals are not added to make them safe. It is not advised to pick up road kill, take it home and eat it, that does not mean all dead meat is bad.

If someone is going to post an article they should at least provide data or facts to support their claims, otherwise they are spouting out opinion and turning the internet into a sludge fest of bad info and data.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

George Johnson → BigWhiteDog • 2 months ago

Fact is I read first hand accounts of people having dogs in for emergency

surgery from these things being swallowed in large chunks and obstructing their bowel. Since the hide has been completely processed with chemicals it is totally indigestible it might as well be a cell phone or remote control they have swallowed

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Darren → George Johnson • a month ago

It isn't indigestible. Thousands of dogs eat these every day and don't have a problem. I am not saying they are good for dogs, but stop trying to scare people with comments, like it might as well be a "remote control" that is stupid. I don't feed them to my cocker any more, but when I did he never had a problem and he was able to digest them, so they are not totally indigestible.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Sharon Henderson • a year ago

Better add Nylabone Flexi Bones MADE IN THE USA to the danger list. Our little Zoe spent 3 days in hospital fighting for her life on IV's, laxatives, and pain medications because she had chewed off and swallowed some plastic shards from this "non-toxic" "healthy" chew bone--within a couple of days of giving it to her. \$600+ vet bill and several xrays later she still has shards in her intestines and may have to have surgery.

10 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

the love of animals • a year ago

Im glad to know other options to give my dog but I hope to stop those slaughtering of these poor innocent dogs in Thailand it's so cruel

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



anhalter • a year ago

We NEVER buy rawhide or bully sticks for our dogs. If you are into organic and high quality dog treats like us, stick with crunchy all-meat treats like Little L's krakems, or Bocce's biscuits. They are made from local ingredients and in NYC (where standards and quality regulations for pet food are the highest in the nation).

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Shari • 2 years ago

I have four dogs. They all love to chew. I too was anti-rawhide because I assumed they posed a choking hazard. Instead, I was buying "Made in America" bullysticks. However, when the bullysticks went up in price for the third time, I switched to cow hooves. This didn't last long as I discovered my dogs were able to chunk off sharp pieces of the hooves and were swallowing them. Pig snouts gave a couple of my dogs diarrhea. I tried the Nylabones that specifically said "Made in the USA," but the dogs didn't really go for them. I also tried Kongs and different chew "toys," but they were too easily destroyed and sometimes swallowed. I then talked to a well respected veterinarian who has been practicing for forty years. He said he gives his dogs rawhides, and in his forty years of practicing, he has never had a problem case due to rawhides. So, I do give my dogs rawhides. We have a chain grocery store in Michigan called Meijer that carries the Pet Factory, Made in the USA, 100% American Beefhide products. The only ingredient listed is American Beefhide, and the package states the rawhides are, "100% Made in the USA following strict GFSI food quality standards.."

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Jo'Ann Boone → Shari • a year ago

Try the Kongs Ballistic line they have a few that are tiger tested or even try the Tuff's line. They are great for your dog. I work in a pet store that has a high standard to making sure your dog is healthy as possible with its food choices. I honestly recommend not giving your dog rawhide if its white or any unnatural color. Now if its per rawhide which is the standard

color then it should be fine.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Joanne Covish • 4 months ago

I had the most amazing sheltie named Maggi May. I fed her a raw hide, she vomited a knot shortly afterwards. The next morning when I woke up she wasn't greeting me as usual. I ran to her as she struggled to stand. I knew by the look in her eyes this was it. I raced her to the vet and he confirmed what I already knew. Her stomach had a blockage. Maggie's heart was slightly enlarged and she was too old for the surrounding she needed to live. I had to put her down thanks to rawhide bones.

I know have three Belgium Malinois and they do just fine without raw hide of any sort.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

ManlyMan ➔ **Joanne Covish** • 4 months ago

I have shelties too, sorry this happened to yours.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Jessica • 2 years ago

Just yesterday, we had to put our puppy down due to severe blockage from a rawhide. It was given to her for Christmas. Little did we know it would lead to her death. We had her in emergency overnight to try and get her to stabilize enough for surgery, and she did not respond well to the fluid treatment, so sadly we had to say goodbye to our sweet girl. I'm so appalled they sell these harmful products for the pets we love like family. I'm also disgusted at how much the veterinarians take advantage of the heartbroken, scared families, knowing there's no saving the animal, yet still pushing for expensive treatments and tests only to see the animal suffer more.

Where is the justice in any of this?

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

disqus_BjYL3h3KOk ➔ **Jessica** • 4 months ago

Sorry for the loss Jessica. Truly painful when you have to have a beloved pet put down when clearly it could have been prevented. Condolences and I feel your pain.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



lucy23 ➔ **Jessica** • a year ago

It deeply disturbs me how some vets take advantage of people and misleading them in medications, treatments, or just plain wrong info! I saw one 3 years ago, and "respected with 38 years of practice" tell an old lady that raw hides were the best for her Great Dane puppy. He was pretty big already and I advised her otherwise afterwards. Disgusting! I'm still careful in selecting my vet and it's been 3 years! But I think I finally found one and I'm glad she also recommends organic natural remedies at times too. Don't forget to always search online to get more info on your dogs needs/ treats!

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Renee Seiler • 2 years ago

My mom's friend's dog just died from stomach torsion. RAWHIDE IS NOT MEANT TO BE SWALLOWED-IT IS NOT DIGESTIBLE!! If you read the directions(if any) these chews are meant to be chewed until they are soft, then removed to harden again, NOT to be swallowed. They are the worst things ever developed for dog chews!!

I give my dogs pig ears, from a wonderful place in Nebraska, you can buy in bulk and they are much cheaper (and fresher) than the ones you find in Wal-Mart, etc. NEVER BUY YOUR FOOD OR TREATS FROM YOUR GROCERY STORE!

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Erica • 2 years ago

Make sure the treats are made in the USA. So many treats are made in China



make sure the treats are made in the USA. So many treats are made in China, Mexico or somewhere else.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Lori Priceless Jones • 6 months ago

On March 27, 2015, I lost my best friend. His name was Change. I had him since he was a baby. This April 9th he would have been 9 yrs old. My heart is still broken. I lost him to a horrific freak accident. He had choked on a rawhide. Just an every day ordinary rawhide. Like the thousands I had given him in the past. I would like to add that Change did NOT die from a small chewed piece of rawhide. It was tennis ball sized!! The size you think is still safe!! He had softened the longer part in the middle. I believe it was his natural reflex to try and swallow it. I was home with Change. I had only left the room for a few minutes. When I found him unconscious I immediately checked his mouth. The large hard end was stuck very tightly in his throat. It took me several minutes to dislodge it before I could start CPR. The longer soft middle is what he swallowed. It pulled the unchewed end into his throat.. . My hope is that this information will continue to CHANGE pet lives forever!!

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Stephanie Eberhardt Wooley • 6 months ago

I gave my Boxers rawhide bones. One of the boys suddenly started vomiting every day and lost half of his body weight. We had him scoped and the doctor pulled a large plug of rawhide from his esophagus. He was only one year old. For nine years, he was fed smoothies. His esophagus was so scarred from the rawhide that he could not swallow even 1 kibble of food. He also had to wear a basket muzzle when outside on his own so he couldn't pick anything up. I absolutely DO NOT recommend rawhide or pig ears.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Robin R. Wicker • 2 years ago

My female basset hound just survived removal of part of her intestine and the surgical opening of the stomach. Yes, it was caused by a rawhide that did not digest. She was inches away from peritonitis. No symptoms were apparent until she was in agony and severely infected. The diagnostic tests, surgery and recovery was \$5,000.00. I have given my dogs U.S. rawhides for years, with no problems. Never again.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Sue • 2 years ago

We give all our dogs moose antlers from Acadia Antlers (you can find them online www.acadiaantlers.com). They are naturally harvested in the United States from yearly "moose sheds" so the moose aren't even harmed by giving these up. They last a really long time, even with our big chewers (we have mostly Pit Bull types) and they really love them.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Cherie Whitaker • 18 days ago

I can tell you I used to give them to my dog, till I saw his gums bleeding and raw from one small bone, and he threw up for a week... no more. I give him doggie ice cream I hand make with bananas plain yogurt and peanut butter, natural and organic, and also beef bones raw, and jerky I make from beef that I would eat without sugars or syrups. and he eats home made meals with veggies and meats and his supplements for his hips and joints because he is 14 years old now. He still thinks he is a puppy and is very healthy, and isnt that what we all want, a healthy happy fur baby?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Hooked on Health • 2 months ago

To me, all of this is pretty immaterial although very important if you still give your dog rawhide for chewing. I just feed my dog raw meaty bones and she is satiated in the chewing department. Plus she has beautiful white teeth and it takes her over an hour to eat which when she was eating kibble, she was done in less than

a minute. I expect her to live a very long and healthy life.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

outis • 2 months ago

My vet turned us off of marrow bones when she pointed out our dog's chipped and cracked teeth. Natural is not necessarily more healthy. My dogs get untreated rawhide rolls made in the US because anything with flavoring gives my Golden Retriever a skin rash. So far, no problems, but I have found pieces of rawhide down her throat when giving her pills. BTW, if you are worried about chemicals on the surface you can soak them in water and they are still time consuming chews.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Natalie • a year ago

They made my two Boston Terrier aggressive

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Anonymous • 2 years ago

I had a rottie and I gave him bones from my butcher. You can buy a bag for quite cheap and I would roast them first to kill off any bacteria. He loved them!

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



lucie → Anonymous • 2 years ago

not being rude or smart but getting to point we can't give our pets anything brought i love my doggies with all my heart but can't be in kitchen forever either as my wheelchair dosen't fit either so what do i do i did all that cooking and ect with my last doggie and she still left me a few months before her 7 th birthday due to severe anemia and heart mumer and broke my heart and my first doggie had all store stuff and lived forever ripe old boy bless him so now i have this one what do i do and i was wondering aren't bones from buthcer and animal bones bad because they splinter???? thankyou :)

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Victoria → lucie • 2 years ago

Lucie, I could be wrong, but it is my understanding that only poultry bones splinter. Whereas beef and pork bones do not.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



naomi → Victoria • 2 years ago

I believe they splinter if they are cooked first, if they are raw they supposedly don't, however, I have given my dog raw rib bones and found small pieces- I guess they are softer since they are raw rather than cooked?

My dog is a big chewer and I found the only thing that I don't worry about too much are bully sticks/bull pizzle. I've tried elk antlers but they chipped her teeth, so I quit that too...

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

ManlyMan → naomi • 4 months ago

I think w/chicken it has to do w/if it's a weight-bearing bone. I think weight-bearing bones are stronger? Not sure but have read to this effect.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Dean G. Saez → Victoria • 3 months ago

wrong!!...beef and pork bones splinter...next time .you have a steak that has a bone in it..try if you can and try to break it..it will splinter

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**JULIEinDSM** → lucie · 2 years ago

I give my dogs bully sticks... they are beef tendon... easier to digest and the dogs LOVE THEM! Another item I give them occasionally are deer antlers... again... a HUGE FAVORITE!

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Mike** → JULIEinDSM · 2 years ago

You can spend your life savings buying bully sticks for two dogs. At \$6 to \$9 per treat per dog per day, I would be spending more on my dogs for a treat than I spend to feed myself.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

sara allen → JULIEinDSM · 4 months ago

Bully sticks are not tendons, they're penis'.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Jo'Ann Boone → JULIEinDSM · a year ago

My dog loves bully sticks. Its a great alternative and better choice.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

PF Flyer → Anonymous · 6 months ago

Can't get them a lot of supermarkets, and where do you find butchers anymore? The slaughterhouses for big chains sell them for fertilizer, etc. & they never make it to the stores. :(

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Tracy** · 2 years ago

What types of chews would you recommend for a small dog who is allergic to beef and chicken? Currently I use original denta sticks (oddly they have neither) or pig ears/pig skin raw hides. Still I would like to find other options. We also do the frozen kongs with pumpkin, sweet potato, and such.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**crogers** · 2 years ago

My 11 and 12 year old pups have been off rawhide since the doggie daycare they used to go to once a week banned them 10 years ago. Their favorite treats are raw frozen meaty marrow bones. I get them at local farmer's markets when I can, grocery store when I can't. They get them once a week. Keeps their teeth in great shape. And makes them very happy.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**besd moore** · 2 years ago

It is very hard to buy treats made in the USA! Even in Pet Stores, it's all from overseas! I refuse to put my dogs at risk! So sad!! Why is this??

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

sara allen → besd moore · 4 months ago

They sell them online in places.. just Google Made in the USA rawhides.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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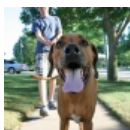
Rick Kelly — Our Flat Coat Bodie died July 4 at the age of 13.5. We will get another Flattie.

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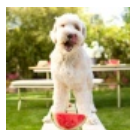
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