

Dear Dr. Wise: Bingo, our eight-month-old German shepherd, is a lovable puppy, but he will play and chew almost anything. Last week he got a soup bone jammed around his lower jaw. We couldn't budge the bone and wound up with the veterinarian who gave him an anesthetic and dislodged the bone. I now wonder whether we should avoid all bones.

Answer: Bingo's predicament is all too common. We see dogs of all sizes and shapes with bones or chew toys jammed into the roof of their mouth, between their upper teeth or between their lower teeth.

A bone can get stuck in the back of a dog's mouth and go unnoticed. Eventually, it can rub against the tissue of the mouth and cause an infection. To prevent such problems, avoid all types of chicken bones because they are small and easily can catch in the mouth, throat or any part of the digestive tract. This includes intestines where bones can perforate the walls.

Some animals will gingerly gnaw on "rawhide" treats and beef bones which work to clean teeth as well as provide pleasure. There can be problems if the dog can quickly crush the bone or toy and swallow the long, dangerous splinters. Beef bones cannot be crushed but owners should assess whether their dog is safe with such bones.

Some dogs get into grave trouble when a ball gets stuck in the back of their throat. They can suffocate in a very short time. Consequently, care should be taken to keep dogs away from balls that can fit in the mouth but not pass through the throat. Super balls are particularly dangerous; even tennis balls can be a problem.

The important point is to always be aware of what your dog is playing with or eating. Even small toys from children or something as harmless as a disposable diaper can cause serious problems if eaten by your dog.

If you have questions about your pet, write to Dr. Wise, 201 S. Capitol Ave. Ste. # 405, Indianapolis, Indiana 46225.