

# Fifty Shades Of Rawhide



By: Dr. Karen Hoffman

**As a veterinarian I am frequently asked if rawhide is a safe treat for dogs to chew.**

What is rawhide? It is dried cattle skin. Finding a safe, good quality rawhide means our clients need to be educated. Have you ever opened a bag of rawhide and noticed an awful smell? The smell is fat because the skins weren't adequately cleaned. Why are some rawhides ultra white? This is because imported rawhide has been treated with chemicals to prevent spoilage. These chemicals are toxic. Signs of toxicity could be vomiting, diarrhea, listless and decreased appetite. Rawhide manufactured in USA use refrigerated containers to prevent spoilage.

USA made rawhide has a hard time competing price wise with products made elsewhere. If a bag of rawhide states it is made in America most of us assume made in USA. Consumers feel safe because they assume all imported rawhide has been inspected for toxicity by the USDA. This is not the case. Plain, unprocessed (no colors, flavorings) rawhide intended as pet chews or treats may be brought into the country without a USDA permit. This is not true. America could mean any country in Central or South America. Rawhide products sold at large retail warehouses can be greatly reduced in price. USA made rawhide products could cost as much as eight times that much!

Another factor to consider when deciding to give rawhide as a treat is the anatomy of dog teeth. The hard, protective covering of teeth for both humans and dogs is called enamel. Dogs' enamel is a quarter the thickness of our own. This means if a dog bites something very hard it is more likely to break a tooth. The cost of extracting these fractured teeth, is very expensive. These teeth are also very painful. Dogs hide pain so this makes you think it does not hurt and less likely to realize it needs to be removed.

There is an organization called Veterinary Oral Hygiene Council (VOHC) that list products considered safe to chew without the risk of fracturing teeth.

Yet another consideration is what kind of chewer is your dog? The effectiveness of rawhide as a way to keep teeth clean depends on how long your dog chews it. If your dog is a gulper this will not help keep periodontal disease from happening. Swallowing a large piece of rawhide can cause a choking hazard or a obstructed gastro-intestinal tract. Both of these problems can be very serious and may need veterinary care, even surgery. Always stay with your dog when chewing rawhide. Back to the question is it safe to give your dog rawhide?

The pro-side is that chewing rawhide is very pleasureable for your dog. It satisfies the desire to chew. It also helps to prevent periodontal disease in your dog. This means less professional cleanings by your veterinarian.

On con-side is exposing your dog to dangerous chemicals, fracturing a tooth, choking or getting a gastrointestinal blockage. Extracting a broken tooth could cost as much as three times the cost of a routine oral prophylaxis.

There is no right or wrong answer. Everyone needs to decide for themselves if they think it is safe or not to give their dog(s) rawhide bones or treats.

**This is not a black or white decision. It clearly has many shades of gray.**