



Photo: Carol Maurin Photography

Help! The Puppy Ate My Shoes!

By Nancy Paule Melone, Ph.D.

It is often the case that new puppy owners feel challenged during certain periods of normal puppy development. If your husband, forgetting to close his closet door before leaving for work, has just lost his new pair of shoes to the jaws of the newest canine member of the family, you may be experiencing such a moment. Anyone who has welcomed a new puppy into their home can understand the feelings of frustration expressed by the reader in this message:

At 7 months, our Bernese Mountain Dog puppy is chewing everything! Can you give me some input as to when I can expect this behavior to stop? I keep him as supervised or contained as possible, have appropriate chew toys, and totally agree that a tired puppy is a good puppy! So, we are basically doing fine, but I am just wondering when this chewing will end, as it's been 15 years since my last puppy.

Bernie's excessive chewing is probably caused by a totally normal event in a puppy's life—he is teething and (fortunately for this owner and the remainder of her husband's shoe collection) is about to get the

LAST of his permanent teeth, his molars. Canine permanent molars usually erupt around the 6th-7th month in the puppy's life. It is likely that Bernie's mouth is a bit sore, and chewing may help him manage the tenderness. Usually, when a puppy finishes teething, owners see a reduction in the amount of chewing (although it may not completely disappear if you have a heavy chewer). If Bernie's "mom" is not already doing so, she might want to stick one of his Kongs in the freezer before giving it to him. The cold can help soothe those sore gums.

This owner's question gives us a good opportunity to talk about canine teeth generally. Puppies usually get their "baby teeth" at around 6 to 8 weeks. When this period is concluded, they will usually have around 28 of these sharp little deciduous teeth (the technical term for "baby teeth"). Owners may never see these teeth as a puppy loses them, because they are small and often swallowed. At around 3 months, most puppies begin to get their permanent teeth. This period lasts until the puppy is around 7 months old, as in Bernie's case, when the last of his permanent molars erupt. When this period is complete, the dog has around 42 permanent adult teeth that will carry him through his life if they are well cared for.

It is important for the dog's general health that these permanent teeth be kept free of plaque, regularly cleaned, and periodically examined by a vet for damage. As many pet owners have learned, natural bones and even durable nylon bones can crack teeth in heavy chewers, leading to lost teeth or expensive dental bills to repair them (yes, dogs do get root canals and bonding!). Like humans, poor dental health in a dog can lead to poor general health, not to mention bad breath, gum disease, and lost teeth or expensive dental bills.

If you have a new puppy, it is often helpful to know when to expect certain teeth to erupt, because it can signal the end of the difficult chewing phase. If you divide the dog's mouth into a left and right side and start at the front of the adult dog's mouth, going along one side, you will see on both the top and bottom three incisors (the most forward teeth). Next are the upper and lower canines, easily recognized by most pet owners. After the canines you can see four upper and lower premolars, and finally two molars on the upper jaw and three molars on the lower jaw. The Hills website has a good picture of this at www.hillsvet.com/practice-management/canine-dentition-normal.html

The permanent teeth at the front of the dog's mouth (incisors) come in sooner than those toward the rear (molars). Incisors begin to appear at 3 to 4 months of age. The last incisor surfaces during the 5th month. Canines come in between 4 and 5 months of age. Premolars erupt at from 4 to 6 months of age, and the last of the molars appear at about 7 months.

So, Bernie's family should see some relief from Bernie's chewing by about 8 months of age.

