

Guide Dogs for the Blind prides itself on providing the best possible care for all our program dogs and we are fortunate to have highly trained and skilled staff in our veterinary, neonatal, and breeding departments caring for our valuable breeding colony dogs. As a world leader in our industry, we are always evaluating all our programs and are open to innovations and enhancements to improve them.

During a recent review by our veterinary team, we reviewed the number of dental extraction procedures performed in our breeding colony dogs and felt we could make some improvements. The leading cause of tooth fractures requiring dental extraction is due to chewing on hard objects, such as Nylabones, elk antlers or marrow bones. The large molars and premolars in the back of the jaw are most often affected. Dogs rarely show signs of pain, even when they have broken teeth. For that reason, broken teeth are most commonly diagnosed by veterinarians on routine physical examinations. Despite the lack of overt signs of pain, any broken tooth with direct root exposure has the potential to be extremely painful to the dog. If broken teeth are left untreated, they can and often will progress to facial swellings, draining wounds, and bone/soft tissue infections.

Unfortunately, once a tooth is fractured, surgical treatment is the only option; depending on which teeth are affected, surgical extractions can be a major surgery.

Chewing is a natural dog behavior. Providing appropriate chew toys is important for meeting a dog's chewing needs. However, every chew toy has benefits and risks.

GDB advises choosing the safest chew toy(s) that meet the needs of an individual dog based on their age, developmental stage, and individual preferences. To help prevent tooth fractures, the chewing of safe items should be encouraged.

While we have recommended Nylabones in the past, we would like to offer some safer alternatives to use when possible. We highly recommend Kongs and Goughnuts; these are made of materials that do not cause tooth fractures and the hollow centers can be used for food enrichment (try freezing a food stuffed Kong to make it more challenging!). These products are durable but still require supervision as dogs can potentially break them apart and ingest large pieces.

The following items have a higher risk for fracturing teeth and should be avoided: natural bones, cow hooves, ice cubes, sticks, rocks, other hard treats or toys.

While some of our GDB programs do allow the use of Nylabones and Benebones, we believe it is in the best interest of our breeding colony dogs to avoid using them whenever possible. If the breeder dog you care for is a dedicated aggressive chewer who destroys Kongs, then we suggest limiting the availability of the higher risk hard chew toys to ~15-minute supervised sessions daily. Please feel free to reach out to our breeding department staff for suggestions and further advice. While nylabones may still be available to breeders while boarding on campus, we would like to reduce the use of them as much as possible while at home.

Thank you for helping us keep our breeding stock dogs' smiles healthy and intact!