

Coprophagia

Eating poop, or coprophagia, is a disgusting and unhealthy habit of many dogs. It is also a normal and sanitary behavior that mother dogs exhibit to keep their nursing pups healthy. There are a number of things that can trigger this behavior, and sometimes it can be a difficult habit to break. With puppies, avoiding coprophagia before it starts is pretty simple. An adult dog that suddenly starts eating poop may have health problems or be suffering from anxieties that need attention. There are many wives' tales and home remedies for coprophagia that probably do not work. There are also products on the market that claim to supplement some missing nutrient that the dog lacks or make the stool unappealing to the dog. These products work with limited success.

Mother dogs and cats must eat the feces of their litter to keep the nest and offspring clean. This behavior usually subsides when the puppies and kittens are able to leave the nest on their own. This instinct may persist in some female dogs, however.

Proper training can avoid coprophagia with puppies. Denying access to the feces is the first step. Using a leash or head halter, distract the puppy away from the stool with a toy or food reward when you take it outside to defecate. This will counter-condition the dog to expect food rather than searching for feces. Once inside, leave the puppy where it cannot see you pick up the stool. It will not take long for the dog to learn the pattern.

Separation anxiety and boredom can lead to eating stools. It is thought that a dog may eat stools to hide an accident in the house. This is one reason to avoid punishing a puppy for defecating in the house during housebreaking. Usually other symptoms of anxiety such as destructive chewing will accompany stress-induced coprophagia.

Under feeding and malnourishment will often cause a dog to resort to coprophagia. Have the dog's body condition checked to be sure it is not under-weight. A dog may be attracted to the feces of another dog that is ill or passing blood. Parasites are passed in this manner. Certain diseases may also trigger eating poop. Cushing's disease causes insatiable hunger, and pancreatic insufficiency may cause malnourishment and weight loss.

If you do want to try food additives to help with coprophagia, be sure to ask your veterinarian if it is safe for your dog. Switching foods sometimes helps, but always transition a dog to a new food slowly over 5 to 7 days to prevent diet-change diarrhea.