

Coprophagia in Dogs (Dogs Eating Poo)

Overview

- Many dogs eat poo out of habit, boredom, hunger, or because they like the taste.
- Contrary to popular belief, it's very rarely because of a medical problem or something lacking from their diet.
- If possible, try to train your dog not to eat poo - and make sure you do it the right way to get the best long-term results.
- Contact your vet if you are concerned about your dog eating poo.

Causes - why do dogs eat poo?



Most dogs eat poo due to habit, hunger, stress, or boredom, only a very small number do it because of an illness or something lacking in their diet.

Habit - some dogs develop a taste for eating poo it from a young age and if they like the taste, it becomes a rewarding behaviour.

Hunger - some dogs eat poo simply because they are hungry or have a big appetite. Some medications can increase appetite so it's important to let your vet know if your dog has suddenly started eating poo after being prescribed a new medicine.

Boredom, stress or anxiety - some dogs eat poo if they are bored, stressed, or anxious, so if it's a habit that's developed suddenly or it only happens at certain times, it's sensible to consider whether it could be linked to any of these factors.

Attention - Some dogs learn that eating poo attracts attention, and for some even negative attention is better than none!

Medical causes - it's very rare for a dog to eat poo because of a medical condition or dietary deficiency but, it's always best to contact your vet for advice if your dog has started doing it suddenly, or you're worried for any other reason. It will help your vet if you tell them about any other symptoms that you've noticed (such as [weight loss](#), poor coat condition, [diarrhoea](#), or [vomiting](#)). If your dog exclusively eats poo from one particular dog, it would be sensible to also have that dog checked to ensure nothing is wrong with them.

Mothers and puppies - it's completely normal for mother dogs to eat their puppies' poo so this should never be discouraged. Puppies will also sometimes eat their own poo (or their littermates' poo) out of curiosity, but this habit usually passes with age.

Poo eating is unpleasant, but fortunately, it doesn't often cause health problems for dogs. However, always contact your vet if your dog is eating poo and seems unwell.

How to stop your dog eating poo

Eating poo is a natural behaviour for most dogs, so training by punishment is likely to be unsuccessful and confusing. The best way to stop your dog eating poo is to distract them and give them something better to do.

Steps to success:

- 1. Supervise.** Monitor your dog's outdoor time - even if they're just going for a quick toilet in the garden.
- 2. Distract.** As soon as your dog approaches a poo, use a friendly voice to enthusiastically call them back.

- 3. Reward.** Give them something more interesting to do – a treat, a game, lots of fuss, or all three. The distraction will need to be ‘high value’ i.e. yummy or special!
- 4. Remove temptation.** If it’s a dog poo – pick it up, if it’s a livestock poo – walk away from it. If it’s everywhere – keep distracting your dog, or put them on the lead!
- 5. Repeat.** As with any habit, it can take a while to break. You will need to repeat this routine every time your dog is near a poo - keep training and you will reap the rewards.

What not to do:

- **Punish.** If you shout at your dog they won’t understand why you are cross, and it might even make them eat the poo even quicker (to stop you taking it away). Some dogs even learn that eating poo is a good way to get attention so if your dog manages to do it while you are training it’s best to ignore them and continue as normal.
- **Muzzle.** Don’t use a muzzle to stop your dog eating poo – it doesn’t stop them wanting to eat it, just limits their ability to do so. Often your dog will still try to sniff or lick the poo round the muzzle and cleaning a muzzle covered in poo is often more unhygienic than your dog eating it in the first place.
- **Give up!** It will take time and patience to get your dog out of the habit, but eventually your hard work will pay off and your dog will learn that it’s much more rewarding to pay attention to you than eat poo.

Pineapple or courgette?

Some people think that adding chunks of pineapple or courgette to their dog’s food will stop them eating their own poo because it gives it a bitter taste. There is no evidence to suggest that this works but it there is no harm in trying (sudden changes in diet can lead to stomach upsets so always introduce new food slowly).

Dog eating cat poo

Does your dog eat poo out of your cat’s litter tray? The best solution is to take the temptation away and put your cat’s litter tray somewhere your dog can’t

get to. Considering using a lidded tray, move it to a room where your dog doesn't go, or put it somewhere only accessible by microchip activated cat flap.

When to contact your vet / behaviourist

If your dog has suddenly started eating poo, call your vet for advice. It's a good idea to have a vet check-up to look for any medical causes before starting any training and seeking advice from a certified behaviourist.

You know your dog best - always contact your vet if your dog shows any sudden changes in behaviour or if you're concerned.

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