

My dog eats poo – help!

Overview

- Unfortunately (for us!), many dogs enjoy the taste of poo, and eating it ‘coprophagia’ is a very normal dog behaviour.
- Contrary to popular belief, if your dog eats poo, it’s extremely unlikely to be because of a health problem or something missing from their diet.
- Some dogs eat livestock poo (horse/cow/sheep), others prefer cat poo, some eat other dog’s poo and some eat their own.
- Read our advice below about how to stop your dog eating poo – it’s important to train them correctly to get the best long term results for both you and your dog.
- Contact your vet if you are concerned about your dog eating poo.



Why do dogs eat poo?

Medical causes

The vast majority of dogs that eat poo do so because they enjoy the taste, **not** because of a health problem or deficiency. However, if the habit is out of character for your dog or you're worried, contact your vet. Keep an eye out for other symptoms such as weight loss, poor coat condition and diarrhoea. If your dog exclusively eats poo from one particular dog, it would be sensible to have that dog checked as well.

Mother and puppies eating poo

Mother dogs eat their own puppies' poo; this is completely normal behaviour and should never be discouraged. Puppies sometimes eat their own poo (or their littermates' poo) out of curiosity, but this habit usually passes with age.

Hunger

Is your dog getting enough food? Are they in good shape? Some dogs eat poo because they are hungry or because they have a very large appetite. Some medications increase appetite – let your vet know if your dog has suddenly started eating poo after being prescribed a new medicine.

Boredom, stress or anxiety

Has anything stressful happened recently? Is your dog easily bored or anxious? Do you have to leave them for long periods? Some dogs eat poo as a response to boredom, stress or anxiety. Your dog may have learnt that eating poo attracts your attention – for some, even negative attention is better than none!

Habit

Some dogs develop a poo-eating behaviour from a young age and never stop – especially if they have spent time bored or underfed as a puppy.

How to stop your dog eating poo

Eating poo is a natural behaviour for most dogs and the best way to stop it is to give them something better to do. Training by punishment is often unsuccessful and is likely to be confusing for your dog.

Steps to success:

1. **Supervise.** Supervise your dog's outdoor time.
2. **Distract.** As soon as your dog approaches a poo, enthusiastically call them back.
3. **Reward.** Give them something more interesting to do – a treat, a game, or lots of fuss. Treats need to be 'high value' i.e. yummy!
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.

***if your dog manages to eat some poo while you are training, ignore them, don't punish them.

Pineapple or courgette?

Some people think that adding chunks of pineapple or courgette to their dog's food stops them eating their own poo because it gives it a bitter taste. There is no evidence to suggest that this works but it does no harm to try.

What not to do:

- **Punish.** Don't punish your dog for eating poo – it's a natural behaviour. Punishment may prevent them eating

one particular poo but is extremely unlikely to break the habit completely – after all, what's the incentive?

- **Muzzle.** Don't use a muzzle to stop your dog eating poo – it doesn't stop them wanting to eat it, just their ability to do so. Cleaning a muzzle covered in poo is often more unhygienic than your dog eating it in the first place.

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 – perhaps use a lidded tray or put it somewhere only accessible by 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 before starting any training or seeking advice from a behaviourist.

You know your dog best. Contact your vet if you're concerned.

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