

For many species, such as rabbits, coprophagy (poo eating) is a normal ingestive behaviour that provides a variety of nutrients, including B-complex vitamins. Mother dogs instinctively ingest their puppies' excrement from birth to approximately 3 weeks of age and adult males will also ingest faeces produced by young puppies.

Although dogs of all ages may show this behaviour, coprophagy is particularly common among puppies and young dogs between 4 and 9 months of age. Besides eating their own faeces they may also ingest faeces of other dogs or animals such as cat or horse droppings. Eating the faeces of other dogs may cause parasitic infections, so it is important to discourage this behaviour.

Understandably, owners find this habit disgusting and anti-social. Where children are in the household, this habit can be unhealthy if they come in close contact with the dog, or the dog licks the child's mouth.

The exact cause is unknown but several thoughts have been put forward. There appears to be some connection between coprophagy and nutritional deficiency, so looking at your dog's diet is important, always consult with your vet to ensure your dog is getting a healthy and balanced diet. Other likely causes to this behaviour are linked with restrictive housing, unsanitary rearing conditions but more importantly stress and attention seeking, where the dog learns that indulging in this act prompts a reaction from the owner.

How to find out more.....

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How to tackle the problem...

- 🐾 Keep the toileting area clear of faeces.
- 🐾 When the dog has been to the toilet, clean up the dog's faeces without any fuss, don't look at the dog or speak to the dog, just pick up the faeces. There is a school of thought that if the owner hurriedly picks up the faeces after the dog has done it, then this can become an issue with the dog, where they then want to 'get in there first' and so they will eat it up quickly. So picking up the faeces with no fuss is important
- 🐾 Try popping some chili powder onto the faeces, then when the dog has eaten some and it tastes bad, the dog has a negative association with the taste of it, which should discourage it from repeating this behaviour.
- 🐾 Put pineapple or courgette into your dog's food. This tastes horrible to the dog once it comes out the other end!
- 🐾 Ensure your dog is wormed regularly to avoid cross infection from ingestion of other animal's faeces.
- 🐾 When you are out on a walk and the dog goes towards another animal's faeces, you have 2 seconds to react, otherwise the moment is lost and the dog goes into 'the zone'. Call your dog to you using food reward, praise and treat when he comes to you, then immediately do some heel work to get the dog back focusing and listening to you.

Top Tips:

- 🐾 Some dogs will eat poop to gain attention. Many dog owners get very upset when their dog eats poo, which means the dog gets attention. It is important to deal with the problem in a calm and matter of fact way so not to give your dog unnecessary attention and therefore reward it for the unwanted behaviour.
- 🐾 You can use your 'leave it' signal to take your dog away if he is trying to eat poo.