



Coprophagia- Why Dogs Eat Poop and How to Stop it

Coprophagia is a common behavior and can stem from both medical and behavioral issues. A study at UC Davis showed that as many as one in four dogs was observed eating poop at least once. Eating feces is more common in multi-dog households, in female dogs and, dogs that consume feces tend to want the fresh stuff. It is best to start with your vet to rule out any medical concerns first. Once you have ruled out all medical reasons for the behavior, you can begin to work on a resolution.

There are several non-medical reasons for Coprophagia. Environmental factors such as isolation, placing food too close to the elimination area or having an elderly dog in the household many contribute to Coprophagia. Some dogs eat poop as an attention seeking behavior. Regardless of the cause, preventing your dog from practicing the unwanted behavior will be key to changing the behavior. Some other reasons your dog may eat poop:

- Poop tastes good.
- Your dog is bored.
- Your dog is hungry.
- Your dog observed another dog doing it and are mimicking.
- Your dog wants their area clean.
- Your dog hides evidence of potty accidents.
- It has become a habit.

It tastes good-

- This is common in households with cats where the dog can get to the litterbox and help themselves to kitty crunchies. The best course of action is to elevate the litterbox so the cat can get in, but the dog can't. You can also look into top-entry litterboxes or use a gate that your cat can pass through, but your dog cannot.
- What goes in, comes out. To your dog, poop may still taste good the second time around. The solution is to actively supervise your dog during potty time and clean up immediately, to prevent your dog from having a chance to practice the behavior.

Your dog is bored-

- Dogs that lack mental and physical stimulation are left to their own devices to keep themselves entertained. Also, if you leave your dog alone for long periods of time, eating poop can bide the time. Try having a large assortment of safe toys and chews and rotate them to keep your dog's interest. Also, increase your dog's mental and physical exercise to help prevent the boredom in the first place.

Your dog is hungry-

- Make sure you feed a high-quality dog food and feed the appropriate amount. Each food will have recommended feeding guidelines. Work with your vet if you are unsure how much to feed.



- Provide long-lasting chews to help appease hunger and provides adequate chewing action, which may alleviate some feelings of hunger.

Your dog saw another dog do it and is mimicking-

- Just like humans, many dogs will copy another dog's behavior, even Coprophagia. If they observe another dog performing the act, they may be keen to try it themselves. If your dog does pick up this unwanted habit, see the other bullets in this document for ideas on extinguishing it.

Your dog wants their area clean-

- Most of the time, this occurs with dogs that potty in the house or especially in the kennel. Picking up immediately after the dog has eliminated is the only surefire way to prevent the dog from eating the feces. There are some products on the market that can be added to the dog's food that are supposed to make their feces taste "unappealing". Those products should be fed to the "pooper" and not the "eater", if by chance it's not the same dog.

Your dog is hiding evidence of potty accidents-

- Sometimes, when dogs get punished or scolded for having an accident in the house, they associate the punishment with the feces and quickly learn that by eating the evidence, the punishment is less likely to happen. The best way to avoid this, is to never punish or even acknowledge the accident. Instead, quickly pick up the feces and clean the area well with a stain and odor remover. It's important to also schedule your dog's meals and walks properly to prevent the accident in the first place. Talk to your accredited dog trainer to discuss more tips on Potty Training and meal management.

It has become a habit-

- This usually presents itself as a dog that eats the feces immediately after eliminating or while in the process of eliminating. We see this often in anxious dogs, hungry dogs (or dogs whose bodies aren't properly using the food they take in), or dogs with other obsessive type behaviors (which are often reinforced through attention). The use of positive reinforcement comes in very handy here. By rewarding with a treat IMMEDIATELY after your dog eliminates (which means you must be standing right next to your dog), you can usually prevent the behavior. Then you would keep the dog away while you pick up the feces. The Leave It cue, taught through positive reinforcement, would also be useful. Trying to remain as calm as possible seems to help, as many dogs in this category will try to hurry and eat it before you can catch them. If your dog falls in this category, always take treats with you outside and keep your dog on a leash to help manage their behavior. If you can prevent them from eating their feces for a while, you may be able to break the habit and be more relaxed about your dog's potty breaks.