

COPROPHAGY (POOP EATER)



Coprophygy (pronounced kä - präf' - je) comes from the Greek copro which means feces and phagy which means eat. And that is what it is – eating feces. Some dogs especially like feces from herbivores like rabbits, deer, and horses. Others love to raid the cat's litter box.

A lot of theories have been suggested as to why dogs eat feces. Are they missing something in their diet? Generally not.

Dogs who eat their feces usually do not have a dietary deficiency. Some dogs, especially those in kennel situations, may eat feces because they are anxious or stressed. Dogs who have been punished by their owners for defecating inappropriately start to think any defecation is wrong, so they try to eliminate the evidence.

Another theory is that coprophagy is a trait passed down through the ages. Dogs' cousins, the wolves and coyotes, may often eat feces if food is in short supply. In some instances, coprophagy may be a behavior learned from watching other animals. It may also become a habit in the course of play and puppies having to try out the taste of everything.

Bitches and queens normally eat the feces of their offspring. This is presumed to occur in an attempt to hide the presence of the litter from predators. Finally, some dogs may eat feces just because it tastes good (to them)

The best way to prevent the problem is to keep yards and kennels free of feces.

Some owners find it successful to use something to make the feces taste horrible. Products such as For-bid (for cats or dogs) and Drs. Foster and Smith Dis-Taste (for dogs) are added to the food of the animal whose feces are being eaten (it could be the food of the dog with coprophagy if he eats his own stool; or the food of the cat, if the dog with coprophagy eats the cat's feces). The product is digested by the animal, and results in giving the feces a very bad taste. Some people try putting Tabasco sauce or cayenne pepper (chili powder) on the feces (not the food!). Unfortunately, some dogs

have acquired quite a taste for Tabasco. These methods work best if the behavior has just started.

Dogs should be on a leash when walking, so you have control over the dog in case a luscious pile of feces is found along the way.

Adding toys and other diversions to the environment may be helpful. We need to find something that is more fun for the dog than eating feces. A dog may find a Kong toy laced with peanut butter a better alternative. Also give the dog lots of exercise to help it ultimately relax.

For dogs attracted to litter boxes, you may need to be quite creative. Using covered litter boxes and placing the opening towards a wall may help. Some people put the litter box up high. Others put the litter box in a closet and secure the closet door so that the opening is big enough for the cat but will not allow the dog to enter. Keep in mind that if we make the litter box too difficult to reach, the cat may not go to it either.

Above all, do not punish the dog for eating feces. This may reinforce the behavior. If the dog knows what is expected of him and looks to you for cues, he may be less anxious and less likely to start or continue the behavior.

Many parasites can be transmitted through eating stool. Generally, herbivores have parasites specific to them; these parasites will not cause disease in carnivores.

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