

COPROPHAGIA (POOP EATING)

Poop eating (called "Coprophagia"), although extremely disgusting, is fairly normal. It's a common complaint among owners. It can, however, be a challenge to stop. For starters, dogs may eat poop for a number of different reasons:

To clean up after themselves. Most of the time, this occurs with dogs that potty in the house or especially in the kennel.

Because they've been punished harshly. Dogs that've been yelled at or smacked for housetraining accidents will sometimes eat poop in an attempt to hide it. PLEASE UNDERSTAND not one single bit of this is motivated by revenge or spite. Combat this with compassion and understanding (and admitting that housetraining errors are ultimately your fault!).

Because they're bored. This would likely be a dog that is left in a yard unattended and they would be eating poop that had been out there a while.

It's become a habit/obsession. This usually presents itself as a dog that eats the poop immediately after eliminating or while in the process of eliminating. We see this often in anxious dogs or constantly hungry dogs, or dogs with obsessive type behaviors which are often reinforced through attention.

Deficiencies in their Body. Dogs whose bodies aren't properly using the food they take in may attempt to supplement themselves by inexplicably eating food twice.

It's animal poop and it just tastes good! Most dogs will raid the cat's litter box, given the chance. Cat, rabbit, deer, and duck, (among others) poop seems to be much more delicious than dog poop...it's like M&Ms in the grass!

OK GREAT, SO WHAT DO I DO ABOUT IT?!

Trying to remain as calm as possible seems to help, as many dogs will try to hurry and eat it before you can catch them. If your dog falls into this category, always take treats outside with you and keep your dog on a leash to help manage their behavior (including blocking access to poop). If you can prevent them from eating their poop for a while, you may be able to break the habit and be more relaxed about their potty breaks.

Go back to potty training basics: Some positive reinforcement training works well here. By rewarding with a treat immediately after the 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 poop.

Environmental Management Pt. 1: Picking up the poop immediately after your dog has eliminated is the only surefire way to prevent the dog from eating it.

While you're at it, buy a couple of good pooper scoopers, and accompany your dog each and every time they go out so that you can clean up after them immediately. This works to stop coprophagia and it benefits the relationship between you and your dog by ensuring that you're an integral part of their life and activities.

Environmental Management Pt. 2: The easiest way to stop a dog from eating cat poop is to make it unavailable, the cat's litter box should be kept somewhere inaccessible to the dog or should be cleaned before the dog has access to it.

Enzyme Boost: When your dog exhibits coprophagia, try adding crushed fresh pineapple or grated zucchini to their diet. This will activate the enzymes in their gut and may reduce the desire to seek out and consume poop.

Food Additives: There are some medicinal products on the market that can be added to your dog's food that are supposed to make their poop taste unappealing. Those products should be fed to the "pooper" and not the "eater," if they're not the same dog

Kibble Trails: Scatter half of your dog's normal ration of dry dog food in the yard. This will appeal to their tracking senses and will occupy their nose and taste buds better than grass and poop.

This is a great time to go on poop-patrol. While you're scooping, your dog will be sniffing out kibble.

Incidentally, kibble trails are an amazing enrichment exercise for dogs of all ages (but especially puppies) and we recommend doing it with your dog often!

Teach an Alert Response #1: Carry a pocketful of extra treats, and when you see your dog sniffing poop in the telltale way (like he's about to scarf it up) ask him to lie down and run over to him and reward him with a treat. Then scoop that poop! You'll be teaching your dog to help you locate the poop like a bomb detector dog who sniffs out and then passively indicates the location of a bomb.

Teach an Alert Response #2: If you've run through training Come, practice it during potty breaks. Create a chain: poop > run over to me > praise > treat or game. As with many things we teach, the dog needs to feel that their behavior can make you do things, that awesome things appear with good behavior. If your dog poops quickly and sprints over to you for a treat or a game of tug, that's not only a speedy poop but also interactive time that short-circuits eating it! Plus free exercise and bonding time...win-win!

Finally, a strong "**Leave It**" command, taught through positive reinforcement, would also be useful to have in your back pocket. Take a look at our video on Leave It:

<http://www.simpawtico-training.com/teach-your-dog-leave-it-and-take-it/>

GOOD LUCK!

