

## Officially this issue is called Coprophagia

### The Good News:

The good news is that you're not alone – your dog is not alone, your dog is normal, and it usually occurs in young puppies under a year old. Amazingly this is not a completely rare behaviour, the term given for this behaviour is Coprophagia and covers off dogs who eat both their own and other dogs' poop. Some dogs will also eat cats' poop, probably for similar reasons.

### Why would a dog do such a thing?

There are lots of theories about why dogs would do this. Let's face it much of what dogs try to eat is not pleasant to us and this is just another one to add to the list – obviously though it is a bit more gross than simply chewing on an old rotten bone. Exactly why dogs do this is not clear, which is why it is not always obvious how to treat the problem.

This is one area that no dog trainer seems to fully understand – exactly why dogs are doing this behaviour. Nobody has an answer that covers off all cases but here some of the common reasons that are suggested as to why dogs do this behaviour:

- 1.** If a puppy is told off and frightened for messing in the house then it has been known for them to start the behaviour of cleaning up after themselves.
- 2.** Mother dogs will often clean up after their young to keep the den clean. It could be an association back to this behaviour
- 3.** There may be a deficiency (such as a mineral or vitamin) in your dog's diet that they are trying to find elsewhere (This does not make sense if they are eating their own)
- 4.** There may be some nutritious benefits of eating their own poop. (Dogs often will eat other animals such as horses and rabbits as if there is a benefit. Also check your dog for worms to make sure they are healthy)
- 5.** They may have too high a protein content in their diet which means that their poop is worth eating again (This only makes sense if they are eating their own)
- 6.** Boredom if they are left alone all day in an empty yard with nothing to do and poop all around them
- 7.** They may have too low a protein content in their diet which means that they are looking for any other source of protein (this would only really make sense if they were eating other dog's poop)
- 8.** Horrible as it may sound but to a dog it may just taste good

## The solution:

Of course if you can have your dog's poo analysed at the local specialist centre then they may well come back with a new suggestion as to what to add to their feed – however for most of us this is not a practical solution.

Whether your dog eats their own poop or other dogs poo here are some of the best ways to stop both these behaviours. Remember that most behaviours are also habits – break the habit for a couple of weeks and you are almost there.

## Eating their own poo:

- **Control the environment and use a long line.** This is a very practical solution but it works. Who cares why your dog is doing this behaviour so long as it stops. You need to put a bit of effort in at the beginning but after a couple of weeks you should see your dog changing their behaviour. Before your dog goes out to poop clip a leash or longer line onto them, then after they toilet call them over with a little tug on the line if necessary and reward them or praise them for leaving the poop. I would suggest that you make the reward for leaving their poop a good one, it may make all the difference whether or not they are focused or not. Once this new habit has been established they should simply do it on their own. You must then immediately remove the new poop giving them no chance to devour it!
- **Add something to their diet to deter them from eating their poop.** There are a number of products that people suggest that you can add to your dogs feed to stop them enjoying the taste of their poop. Whilst I personally have not heard of any great success stories by using this method I am sure that somebody has. And it is completely harmless and gentle. The most common foods that are credited with putting dogs off eating their own poop seem to be pineapple, spinach or marmite.
- **Provide the vitamin or mineral in their diet.** You may find that adding another food to your dog's diet may help the problem is trying to decide which one it is for your dog! – Banana is often credited with helping in this situation however you will have to monitor your dogs behaviour carefully to see what works and what does not.
- **Replace the lost enzymes.** If your dog started the behaviour after a course of antibiotics then consider trying a boost of enzymes from a good pet store or vets to replace the good bugs that may have been killed off.
- **Change of diet.** It is possible that a change of diet may help (there are reported cases) but it does not solve the problem in every situation.

## Eating another dog's poo:

- **Set yourself up to win.** Often the first 100m of any walk seem to have more poops on the ground than further on. Keep your dog on a short leash in this area so that no mistakes can be made
- **Develop an amazing “leave it” command.** If you find your dog eating other dogs poo on the walk then the solution is to develop an amazing leave it command. Here you simply need to motivate your dog to leave it and the reward will be worth it. With time your dog will get better and better at simply leaving the poop on their own. You first need to keep your dog on a short line or a long line and carry some amazing treats with you. When your dog starts sniffing and looking at something then get control and put your dog into a sit if necessary to get their attention then simply say in a very clear voice “leave” and walk them away making sure that they know you were referring to the poop. As soon as they walk away reward them with an amazing treat so that the words leave it become something that they want to obey. If your dog doesn't care for any food treat then use the ball or affection to reward them (or all three!)

## Repetition:

Repetition is the mother of all skills....Stick to this practical approach and your dog will learn that poop is no longer on the menu.

*Q&A*

**Q: What should we do if our dog does eat a poo on the walk and we are too slow to stop him?**

*A: Firstly make the line shorter or try to find a cleaner area – this will lessen the likely hood of the mistake happening again. Say to your dog in a clear voice. “No” or something equivalent but don't overdo it, you just want your dog to know that what they did is not acceptable, then leave them on a short leash for a decent period of time. This is the punishment – their freedom has been taken away.*