

FACT SHEET

Coprophagia (Faecal eating)

Coprophagia in adult dogs

Coprophagia is the ingestion of faeces. It is a very common problem and quite normal to most breeds, it can be due to either a behavioural trait or a mild digestive problem.

The term Coprophagia covers several different types of faecal eating:

- Eating their own faeces
- Eating other dogs faeces
- Eating cat litter. This can be particularly dangerous especially with regard to cat litter that contains wood. If wood is ingested, naturally the wood will absorb water, which can lead to gastric torsion in dogs.

The cause of this particular trait is not definitive, but may be due to the following:

- Nutritional deficiencies
- Boredom
- Attention seeking
- Detection of nutrients in faeces

Coprophagia in puppies

After giving birth, a mother dog (bitch) keeps her pups clean. The mother dog stimulates elimination of urine and faeces with her tongue and ingests her pups' waste. This keeps the nest clean, prevents disease and removes odours that could attract predators.

Newborn pups cannot voluntarily relax their sphincters until later in life. Young puppies may begin eating their stools when their mother no longer performs the task. Coprophagia in pups may persist beyond an acceptable phase or the pups may become coprophagic when placed in a new home. Some dogs appear to enjoy this activity, making it all the more disgusting to their owners.

Treatment

Although most owners find this most distasteful and upsetting, dogs seem to use it as a supplementary way to increase their energy intake. There are no real health concerns associated with this act aside from parasites and cat litter as previously mentioned, but aesthetically it can be a problem.

Reducing coprophagia activity can take many forms:

- Feed several meals per day of a good quality food containing a higher level of fibre. Fibre adds to the feeling of fulfillment and may decrease the need for coprophagia if it is associated with appetite.
- Enhance their own digestive environment and system by re-establishing microflora colonies through probiotic supplementation. This will ensure they are more resistant to possible infection from the behaviour and if it is performed due to a nutritional imbalance/issue, may help resolve or break the habit.
- Take the dog to an open space where the daily defecation and training can take place and be cleaned up immediately, thereby removing the opportunity to eat faeces.
- Make life at home and at exercise more exciting and playful so as to distract the animal from the need to eat the faeces. The use of brightly coloured and noisy toys may also help to distract. Take the toy out on the walk and if the dog shows interest in a stool, distract them and take them away from the faecal area.
- Always ensure that dogs cannot access cat litter trays.

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How can Naturediet help?

Many of the pet foods fed to our dogs do not contain the right balance of high quality proteins, vitamins and minerals. Producing the correct balance of all of the above is a fine art. In particular, feeding dogs purely on raw meat does not provide the correct nutritional balance.

Naturediet is an ideal choice as it has a balanced fibre content and provides the easily digestible ingredients and is free from additives, preservatives or colourings. Fed at the right level for the individual, the faeces will contain waste matter only and not unprocessed food particles, which can be desirable to the dog.

Training will still be necessary to reduce the behaviour as depending on how long the dog has performed it, it may be habitual behaviour and distraction techniques are best in these circumstances.

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