



# Poop Eating

Eating feces, coprophagia, is not an uncommon behaviour for the canid family. Some dogs seem predisposed to coprophagia, regardless of other factors. The causes may be nutritional, metabolic, or behavioural (seen especially in anxious dogs). Dog experts suggest that while it is disgusting to us, it is relatively harmless for the dog. If your veterinarian agrees that it is harmless, one approach is to ignore the behaviour.



## 1. VETERINARY EXAMINATION – DO THIS FIRST!

You need to see your veterinarian, as there could be a medical problem at the bottom of this. It has been suggested that dogs with certain dietary deficiencies are prone to coprophagia. An inability to digest food could be at fault. If the food is not fully digested, feces may appear to the dog as food.

Coprophagia has also been associated with anxiety and stress. Do not use corrections. You will need to consult with either a veterinary behaviourist (see: <https://www.dacvb.org/search/custom.asp?id=5985>) or a properly qualified canine behaviour consultant (<https://m.iaabc.org/consultant/>).

## 2. ABSOLUTELY NO CORRECTIONS

Corrections drive anxiety, so if the behaviour is rooted in anxiety, corrections will make it worse. If it is not rooted in anxiety, it soon will be if you get upset with your dog for eating her poop. If your dog eats her poop despite your best efforts, understand how desperate her anxiety may be, and try not to get upset. It will only make it worse.

## 3. MANAGEMENT

Management and prevention are the first steps in behaviour modification. Prevent your dog from eating poop by luring her away from it with lots of treats, then drop more treats on the ground away from the poop, and then you can pick it up without confrontation. You are now also teaching her that leaving the poop is a good thing – yay!

Go back to housetraining basics. Always supervise your dog in the yard, so that you can intervene and lure her away from the poop while also rewarding elimination outside. Keep elimination events relaxed and positive. No corrections, not even if she eats it. Just lure her away. No big deal.

Are you feeding your dog often enough? Most adult dogs do best if they eat at least two meals a day (young dogs three or more). Training sessions can be conducted at mealtimes or throughout the day. Consider wearing your dog's daily food ration on your person and, after giving your dog a smaller breakfast, use the remainder of the day's food to reward good behaviour throughout the day, as well as in food puzzles for a more interesting eating experience.

This management plan may take several weeks, probably months, before you see an actual behaviour change, depending on how serious the problem is. Don't test the dog too soon! Most importantly, avoid stressors, such as the use of corrections, in your dog's life.

## 4. REMOVE THE REWARD

Has someone been inadvertently rewarding the behaviour? Did a family member see it happen? How did that person react? Is your dog doing this to get attention? If you scold the dog or rush over to get him away from the poop, that can be perceived by your dog either as a reward, or as a stressful event, both of which may make the behaviour worse.

The behaviour may also be due to boredom: is your dog playing with the feces for something to do? This is particularly common in the winter months in snowy climates where frozen feces turn into poopsicles! Teach and reward a substitute behaviour and provide plenty of entertainment by using food puzzles.

Eating poop can be a self-rewarding behaviour. Food additives available in pet shops are designed specifically to make the feces repulsive, but mixed results have been reported. Some people have reduced coprophagia by adding a bit of canned, crushed pineapple to the food or a sprinkle of enzymes such as meat tenderizer. NOTE: Both commercial and homemade remedies such as these need to be cleared by your veterinarian.

## 5. REWARD APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

Reward your dog every time she eliminates by luring her away from the poop with treats and then give her lots of treats and love for not eating it.

