

Homeward Bound Golden Retriever Rescue

Golden Rule Training

Canine Coprophagia

"Coprophagia" is defined as the ingestion of any type of faeces, and is a common complaint of dog owners. For humans it can seem disgusting and embarrassing for our dogs to engage in this behavior. It is somewhat a natural act for dogs, but as we domesticate our pets, we expect these behaviors to disappear; however, they are still animals with natural instincts!

A dog may eat its own faeces, those of another dog or the faeces of another species. Dogs commonly eat the faeces of cats with which they share a household (or farm animals).

The only circumstance in which coprophagia is considered a normal behavior is when a mother dog eats the faeces of her pups from the time of their birth until about 3 weeks of age. It is felt that the mother does this to keep the area clean until the pups are able to move away from it to defecate. A clean area may be less likely to attract predators in the wild.

What behaviors are linked with coprophagia?

Coprophagia may be a behavioral or a medical problem. It may be a type of behavioral coping mechanism for an animal that is caught in a stressful situation, such as a sudden environmental change. It can also be a tactic to avoid punishment for having a bowel movement in an inappropriate area.

Coprophagia can inadvertently be taught to a puppy or adult during housetraining; if the puppy or dog is scolded or he sees the owner 'cleaning up' the bowel movement in the house, the puppy may learn to 'hide' the bowel movement by eating it. There is also a possibility that some dogs may simply just enjoy it!

What are some of the medical causes?

Coprophagia may be a sign of an underlying medical problem. Internal parasites or diseases that affect major organ systems (such as the pancreas or thyroid gland) may cause an animal to exhibit coprophagia.

Any medical problem that leads to a decrease in absorption of nutrients, causes gastrointestinal upset or causes an increase in the appeal of the dog's stool, could lead to coprophagia. In addition to a complete physical examination, the puppy's diet and its stool frequency and consistency should be evaluated. Stool testing for parasites would be the minimum level of testing. If the stool is unusually soft or appears to be poorly digested, additional stool or blood tests may be warranted.

Feeding a poorly digestible diet, underfeeding, and medical conditions that decrease absorption such as digestive enzyme deficiencies or parasites, could lead to malnutrition, vitamin and mineral deficiencies and therefore an increased appetite and possibly stool eating. In addition, if the stools contain large amounts of undigested food material, there is an increased likelihood that the puppy would eat the stools.

When adult dogs suddenly begin to eat stools, it may also be due to malabsorption of nutrients or nutritional deficiencies. In addition, any condition that might cause an increase in appetite or an unusual appetite, such as diabetes, Cushing's disease, thyroid disease, or treatment with certain drugs such as steroids, may lead to an increase in stool eating. Some dogs that have been placed on a highly restrictive or poorly balanced diet may also begin to eat their stools. It should also be noted that if a dog develops a taste for a particular dog's stool, that dog should be tested for any type of condition that might lead to poor digestion of the food (and therefore excessive food elements remaining in the stool). If your adult dog just starts eating faeces, see your veterinarian to rule out any medical issues.

No matter what the reason, it is not a good idea to allow your dog to engage in this behavior. Eating of another dog's faeces can expose a dog to internal parasites and bacterial infections, as well as raise the risk of viral infections like distemper and parvo.

How to prevent the behavior

The most effective way to prevent a dog from engaging in this behavior is to remove the temptation by keeping the yard free of feces by disposing of it promptly. Keep your dog on a schedule so you can determine when it is time for him to relieve himself, and always be around to immediately pick up the waste.

Owners can also train the dog early in puppy-hood, before it becomes too habitual.

Other methods that have been employed with varying degrees of success are feeding the dog things like garlic and pumpkin, which are believed to make the feces less appealing

Spray the feces with a foul smelling solution (most dogs despise citronella, for example) that will make the dog not want to eat the excrement.

Stool-Eating Preventatives: These are effective food additives; one is called, appropriately, Stop Eating Poop (SEP), by Solid Gold. The active ingredient in S.E.P. is Glutamic Acid. When Glutamic Acid is mixed with the stomach acids, the stool becomes bitter to the taste, which deters the dog from eating the stool. You can find many brands in pet supply stores and on the internet.

Again, please see your veterinarian to rule out any medical issues.

For Products try : <http://www.ONLYNATURALPET.COM> and <http://www.ENTIRELYPETS.COM>

Source(s):

<http://www.petalia.com>

<http://www.doghealth411.com>

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