

Coprophagia

What is it? Coprophagia is the act of eating stools or more simply put poop eating. This might be stools of other animals such as cats, deer or cows or it might be dog stools. Some dogs eat their own stools; some dogs eat other dog's stools.

Why? There are many theories on why dogs do this. Mother dogs need to help very young puppies defecate. They do this by licking the puppies to stimulate defecation and will eat the stools to help keep the whelping box clean. It is possible that coprophagia is part of this instinct, although it is unclear why male dogs would engage in this behavior as well. Coprophagia can also be an indication of some medical problems. Another theory is that the dog is hungry or is not receiving sufficient nutrients in his diet. Puppies also frequently eat stools as a part of their exploratory phase. Some puppies outgrow this, others continue into adulthood.

Risks/concerns? Since Coprophagia can be an indication of some medical issues, you should check with your vet to make sure that your dog is healthy. Another risk is that your dog can ingest parasites when eating the stools of other dogs or animals. This puts them at a higher risk to catch parasitic diseases such as giardia.

What is daycare doing about it? We pick up all stools immediately. However, frequently several dogs will defecate at the same time and it might take us a few minutes to get around to all the stools. In the meantime, staff attempts to distract the stool eating dogs by calling them and interacting with them in command practice. Also, some dogs are quite voracious stool eaters and will consume the stools as the other dog is in the act of defecating. In that situation we attempt to call the dog away from the stools and intervene immediately to stop the behavior if they do not respond. If a dog does manage to consume stools, the dog receives a timeout. Frequently dogs that start this behavior as a puppy will outgrow the behavior – especially with the consequence of a timeout. Occasionally we have dogs that are such avid stool eaters that the timeout is not a big enough consequence to cease the behavior. (This is like a child that might think it's worth getting sent to their room for consuming a banana split!) With these dogs we work very hard on teaching them to come when a dog is defecating and if several dogs are defecating at once we might place the coprophagic dog in timeout while we finish cleaning up to prevent access.

What should you do about it? First you should check with your vet to make sure that there are not any medical issues causing this behavior. You should also discuss with your vet if a diet change might help solve the problem. With some dogs simply changing to a higher quality diet or a diet with a different composition will stop the stool eating. If your dog is eating his own stools there are additives that you can add to his food that will make the stools unappetizing (discuss this with your vet first). If he is eating the stools of

other dogs, you should also ensure that your dog is not getting the opportunity to practice the behavior at home or while he is out with you. If you see your dog about to eat a stool, you should call your dog to you and engage him in other activities. If your dog does not respond, interrupt the stool eating and if possible give him a timeout. Punishment does not generally work to solve this problem. The dog simply learns to consume the stools while you are not watching or to gobble them down faster as you approach.