

Happy New Year! from Central Utah Wag-N-Train Dog Rescue & Training, Inc. Here is our January Training Tips E-Newsletter.

This month's subject is distasteful to say the least, but unfortunately it is a very common problem for some dog owners and so we decided to go ahead and cover the subject.

Coprophagia - or in layman's terms - APoop Eating®. Although most of us cringe at the thought and find it repulsive, it is actually quite natural for dogs, especially puppies, to eat feces - (feces found in the kitty's litter box is an especially favorite treat!).

All puns and kidding aside, the fact is this common canine habit can be unbearable to some dog owners and can result in them choosing to give their dog up. If your dog engages in feces eating and her cess pool breath is taking all the joy out of your otherwise sweet and lovable family companion, then we hope this newsletter will help you.

First off, we advise that you take your dog for a complete health check by your veterinarian. There are several health and nutritional conditions that can contribute to coprophagy including Pancreatitis, Intestinal Infections, Parasites, and Food Allergies. So you will want to rule out any possible health problems first.

There are several more factors that can contribute to coprophagy that you may want to consider in case they may be the reason behind your dog engaging in this habit:

****cheap, generic dog food** often passes through the dog's system undigested, leaving a stool that looks and smells much like what was originally eaten.

Feeding a higher quality dog food may solve this stool eating problem.

****A dog that is locked in a kennel, chained or restricted to a small kennel/backyard** may eat his own feces as a way of relieving **boredom**. It is something to do in an otherwise boring world. This dog needs more stimulation, exercise and play time with his owners and consider bringing the dog in the house to be with the family more.

****The emotional stress** of being left alone or restricted to a small area for long periods of time without companionship of the caregiver can result, for some dogs, in the eating of his own poop. This dog needs more stimulation, exercise and play time with his owners.

****Some dogs learn that eating stools is a way to get your attention**, even though the attention often consists of scolding. Concentrate on ignoring the coprophagia and providing positive reinforcement for your dog's good behavior.

There are as many hypothesis for why some dogs eat their poop as there are as many remedies of how to quash the problem. Whether you can ever determine the cause of your dog's poop eating, the most important factor to dog owners is HOW DO I STOP IT? The best way to correct coprophagia is to prevent access to fecal material. If stool is not available, then your dog cannot eat it. Clean up your dog's feces immediately after he defecates and do not give him the opportunity to indulge himself. If your dog prefers Kitty's poops, then prevent access to the litterbox: Put it up high, put a lid on it, put it in a room that the dog can't access, whatever it takes. I've known someone who completely eliminated the problem of the dog getting to the cat box by putting the cat box in the laundry room and they installed a simple cat door in the door. That door remained shut, but the cat could still get in. Very simple and the problem was solved.

If your dog only prefers eating his own poop, many dog owners have had success in

stopping coprophagia by supplementing their dog's diet with one spoonful of canned pineapple or a teaspoon of spinach or MSG. There are also products on the market such as AForbid® that can be added to the dog's food to help stop the problem. Some people have suggested putting hot sauce on your dog's fecal matter to discourage coprophagia, but some dogs like hot sauce and consider it a garnish, so find out what your dog does not like before using it. Unfortunately, these additives are not always effective, but they may be worth a try for you.

If your dog is more interested in eating other dog's poops, keep your dog on leash to prevent his uncontrolled access to feces. Create opportunities for you to praise your dog for not eating feces. Leash walk your dog in areas where you'll find what tempts him. If you happen upon feces that your dog is interested in, move quickly away from the stool as soon as possible and praise your dog.

You may also want to add the command ALeave it® to your dog's repertoire. Supervising your dog while he defecates and then telling your dog ALeave it® and offering a treat and praise as a reward will encourage your dog to leave his fecal matter alone. When first implementing the ALeave it® command, leave a leash on your dog so that if he doesn't immediately heed your command you can give a tug on the leash and get his attention so you can praise him for ALeaving it®.

If your dog is left along for long periods of time, to avoid the onset of boredom provide some interactive toys for your pet (ie. Kongs stuffed with peanut butter, kibble and cheese--place it in the freezer then give it to your pup for hours of enjoyment.)
<http://www.kongcompany.com/how2use.html>

Another suggestion is to crate train your dog so your dog is not left to eliminate unsupervised [See Wag-N-Train's March '03 E-Newsletter AWhat is Crate Training®]. The close confinement of the crate encourages control since most dogs will avoid eliminating in their crate and will hold it until they can be outdoors. By crating your dog you can control your dog's elimination time so you can be there to supervise elimination and offer praise.

I know we've provided you with a lot of information and ideas to try, but unfortunately there is no quick Afit it® for coprophagia in most cases. However, prevention and consistent praise and rewards for appropriate behavior will get you a lot farther than scolding and punishment. If you have not already done so, begin implementing a training program to help your dog gain his orientation to you as the leader of his pack [See Wag-N-Train's November E-Newsletter ATeaching Your Dog To Say Please®]. A dog who offers a polite Asit® to earn his meals, praise, petting, treats, toys, etc. is deferring to your leadership and will be less likely to feel the need to indulge in coprophagia, thereby giving you another opportunity to eliminate the problem all together.

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