

# Dog: Poop Eating (Coprophagia)



## Why Dogs Eat Poop

Nobody knows for sure why dogs eat poop, but we do know it's a common and natural behavior in dogs (and many other species). Scientists think the practice originated as a way to keep the den area free of parasites and avoid attracting other predators. Poop eating is particularly prevalent in puppies, and often, they grow out of the habit as they mature. Some dogs never do, though, which leaves the dog's human family with an unsavory problem.

## How to Deal with Poop Eating

Unfortunately, the poop-eating habit is difficult to break. Some commercial taste-deterrent products claim to make the taste of the dog's feces unpalatable, but currently there are no studies to back this claim up as a successful cure. Prevention, training, and plenty of environmental enrichment are your best bets.

### Do...

- Always rule out hunger and malabsorption or other medical reasons for poop eating. See your vet for advice, including the correct amount of food for your dog.
- Make sure your dog eats high-quality food with human-grade ingredients. Look for whole meat sources, not meat byproducts. Quality dog food is rarely available in supermarkets or grocery stores; try specialty stores that carry natural pet foods.
- Supervise your dog on all outings, including potty trips to the backyard, and immediately clean up poop.
- Keep your dog on leash in areas where other dogs go potty. Teach your dog the "leave it" command and carry high-value treats to reward him for complying.
- For off-leash areas, teach your dog a rock-solid recall and, again, carry high-value treats to reward your dog for coming away from temptation when you call.
- Give your dog plenty of exercise and mental stimulation. Play games or participate in a fun dog sport. Provide puzzle toys and work-to-eat toys at home.

### Don't...

- Don't rub your dog's nose in poop, his own or that of other dogs. It won't teach him not to eat poop and may make him scared of you.
- Never punish your dog physically for eating poop. Again, it won't change the habit, and punishment can cause dogs to develop fear and aggression problems.