



Campbelltown Veterinary Hospital

Veterinary Surgeons

Gary Ashton B.V.Sc. Dip. Appl.Sc.

Lisa Henshaw B.V.Sc. MANZCVS (Behaviour)

www.campbelltownvet.com.au

email: ctownvet@bigpond.net.au

15 Chamberlain Street

(P.O. Box 663)

Phone: (02) 4626 4222

Fax: (02) 4628 2322

Coprophagia in dogs

Coprophagia is the scientific term for a nasty habit some animals develop of eating their own or another animal's faeces. The reasons for this vary. First we need to rule out a medical reason by doing a thorough clinical examination, faecal analysis and a blood test on the culprit. If they are only eating another animal's faeces, then testing may be advised for that animal. There could be a problem with either animal's food digestion.

After ruling out a medical reason we are left with a number of behavioural possibilities, with different solutions for each. Dogs often eat cat faeces because it tastes good to them. The only prevention is to restrict access by placing a wire cage over the litter tray, putting it up high or installing a cat door to the room where the tray is kept.

Some dogs eat faeces because they are bored. Dogs need plenty of physical and mental stimulation every day. Some breeds need as much as 20 minutes off-lead exercise twice daily (not in their own back yard), and 15 minutes of training broken into several short sessions. If they are home alone it may also help to provide them with an interesting view and some interactive food-dispensing devices such as Kongs or treat balls.

Other dogs may have learnt that coprophagia elicits quite an exciting response from their owner. In other words they use it as an attention-seeking behaviour. Be careful not to unintentionally reinforce this by your actions.

Whatever the cause it will probably be necessary to retrain your dog to ignore faeces. It is important to limit access by disposing of faeces as soon as possible. Learn to predict when your dog is going to eliminate. Regular meal times and premium dog food (less waste) help with this. Toilet your dog on-lead (preferably with a head halter on) and prevent him from eating faeces. Reward him with food for ignoring it.

If you're not squeamish there is a less palatable option you may try. The idea is to "booby trap" a sample or two for your dog to discover. You need to collect some faeces, create a space inside it and fill this with hot sauce, then reform the sample and smear the outside with untainted faeces then let him find and eat it. Don't let him see you creating the trap though.

There are a number of things that may be added to the dog's diet that may deter him from ingesting faeces. They include food products that taste bad after digestion such as crushed pineapple, paw paw, cottage cheese or breath freshener. Thrive D is a powder supplement which includes digestive enzymes which often seems to help because it improves food digestion and alters the taste of the faeces. Wild Forage is a liquid natural herbal product that seems to work in a similar way. Feed your dog premium brand dog food to maximise digestibility and minimise faecal production. Our vets and nurses are happy to help choose an appropriate food for your dog. When changing your dog's diet start gradually and introduce new food over a period of one or two weeks. Don't forget to worm your dog regularly (every 3 months for adults; more often for puppies). Please ask us for any further advice on this matter as we realise it can be very frustrating for dog owners.