

Coprophagia (Eating Feces)

Coprophagia is the name given to the habit of eating stools. This term applies regardless of whether the dog eats its own stool or some other animal's. In most cases, the cause is unknown, but there are numerous possible behavioral explanations. Most experts cite boredom as a common cause. Other reasons include unresolved conflict, confinement in closed quarters or having acquired the taste during puppyhood. Once established, the habit is difficult to break.

In a minority of dogs, a medical reason could be the causative factor. Dogs with a malabsorption syndrome have an increased appetite and eat stools in an attempt to acquire additional calories. Coprophagia has also been described in association with an enzyme deficiency, corticosteroid therapy, Cushing's Disease, diabetes mellitus, hyperthyroidism, protein losing kidney disorders, pancreatic exocrine insufficiency and intestinal parasites.

Diagnostic workup and examination is warranted for coprophagic pets. This may include scrutinizing their diets and running basic lab work such as blood counts, biochemical profiles, internal parasite fecal exams, and perhaps specific tests for specific internal deficiencies.

Management includes removing stools from the environment as quickly as possible, making cat litter boxes inaccessible to dogs, and by providing extra attention, exercise and interaction with pets and family. Dogs should be provided with extra toys during an owners absence. Dogs should be walked on leash when possible so that owners can prevent ingestion of fecal material.

A number of ingredients have been suggested as additives to the dog's food in order to improve digestion or render the stools unappetizing. A partial list includes meat tenderizers, crushed pineapple, Viokase, B-complex vitamins, sulfur, glutamic acid, monosodium glutamate, sauerkraut and canned pumpkin. The effectiveness of these additives

vary and there are no scientific studies to confirm or deny their effectiveness. There are also no studies to determine any potential health risks that may be caused by any of these additives, although none have been reported.

For-bid, a product made from alfalfa that gives the stool a disagreeable odor and taste, is a frequently recommended product by veterinarians.