



Whole Dog Journal™

Dog Mounting and Dog Dominance Behavior

Do dogs hump to assert dominance? Not really - they do it because they are bored, stressed, excited, or, LEAST often, sexually aroused.

By Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, CDBC

[Updated April 20, 2018]

HUMPING PROBLEMS IN DOGS: OVERVIEW

1. Watch for early signs of mounting, and take appropriate steps to discourage them as soon as they arise.
2. Neuter your male dog sooner, rather than later.
3. Use “Good Manners” training and a “Say Please” program (described below) to create structure in your household and give yourself a control advantage.
4. Seek assistance from a positive trainer/behavior consultant if you’re not making progress on your own, or if you don’t feel comfortable addressing the behavior on your own.

Luke had been at the shelter for more than a month, and the staff was delighted when the two-year-old Cattle Dog mix was finally adopted to what seemed like the perfect home. Introductions at the shelter with the adopter’s other dog went reasonably well – although the two didn’t romp together, they seemed perfectly willing to peacefully coexist. Luke went to his new home just before Christmas. Before New Year’s, he was returned.

Her cheeks damp with tears, the adopter explained that the two dogs were fighting. Luke insisted on mounting Shane. Shane would tolerate the rudeness for a while, but when he finally let Luke know that he found the behavior unacceptable, a battle would ensue. The intensity of the fights was increasing, and the adopter was concerned that one or both of the dogs was going to be badly injured. I discussed the situation with her, and agreed that returning Luke was the right decision.

Dog Mounting is NOT About Sex

First, we're not talking about sexual behavior displayed by intact male and female dogs used for breeding. High hormone levels and normal sexual responses to other [intact dogs \(/issues/16_2/features/Keeping-Your-Dog-Intact_20686-1.html\)](/issues/16_2/features/Keeping-Your-Dog-Intact_20686-1.html) are different from "problem mounting." Sometimes, an owner will report that when her young dog plays with other dogs, he gets overstimulated and will attempt to mount another dog or even just "air-hump" for a few seconds. In preadolescent and neutered dogs, this is generally a byproduct of physiologic arousal – an inappropriate response triggered by sensory stimuli, motor activity, and/or emotional reactivity.



These two dogs enjoy roughhousing together, but the spayed female occasionally mounts the younger, neutered male in an effort to put and keep him in his place – lower than her in the chain of command. As long as he defers, their play continues.

The dog who is most likely to be reported as having a real mounting problem is the dog who routinely mounts people, or, like Luke, who mounts other dogs to the point of provocation. This sort of mounting behavior has nothing to do with sexual activity. Rather, it's often a social behavior, and sometimes a stress reliever. Nonsexual mounting of other dogs is generally a dominance, control, or challenge behavior, although when practiced by puppies it's primarily about play and social learning, beginning as early as 3–4 weeks. Mounting of humans is strictly nonsexual; it may be about control, it can be attention-seeking, and it can be a stress-reliever.

Dogs will also mount inanimate objects. Our Pomeranian will hump our sofa cushions if we leave the house and take all the other dogs with us. While some dogs do sometimes masturbate for pleasure, in Dusty's case I'm convinced he's not seizing a moment of privacy for self-gratification, but rather mounts the cushions as a way to relieve his stress of [being left home alone \(/issues/21_5/features/Leaving-the-Dog-Home-Alone_21832-1.html\)](/issues/21_5/features/Leaving-the-Dog-Home-Alone_21832-1.html).

In fact, if dogs did wait for some private time to engage in their mounting behaviors, most owners would be far less concerned about it. But dogs, having no shame, are far more likely to take advantage of a visit from the boss or the in-laws to display their leg-hugging prowess. Regardless of how much you love your dog, it's embarrassing to have him pay such inappropriate attention to your guests.

Get Your Dog to Stop Humping

Like a good many canine behaviors that we humans find annoying, inconvenient, or embarrassing, mounting is a perfectly normal dog behavior. And like other such annoying, inconvenient, and embarrassing behaviors, it's perfectly reasonable for us to be able to tell our dogs to stop!

Brief bouts that involve mounting of other dogs in canine social interactions might be acceptable, as long as they don't lead to bloodletting or oppression of the mountee. Mounting of human body parts rarely is, nor is mounting that, as in Luke's case, leads to dogfights.

So, if there's a Luke whose mounting behavior is wreaking havoc in your family pack, what do you do?

The longer your dog practices his mounting behavior, the harder it is to change. So it's logical that the sooner you intervene in your dog's unacceptable mounting, the better your chances for behavior modification success.

Neutering is an obvious first step. A 1976 study found an 80 percent decrease in mounting behavior following castration. (This is far more often a male dog behavior problem than a female one.) The same study determined that within 72 hours of surgery, the bulk of hormones have left the dog's system. Since mounting is partially a learned behavior as well as hormone-driven, the extent to which neutering will help will be determined at least in part by how long the dog has been allowed to practice the behavior. Just one more strong argument for juvenile sterilization, between the ages of eight weeks and six months, rather than waiting for your dog to mature.

When Your Dog Humps Other Dogs

Luke, at age two, had been practicing his mounting behavior for many months. In addition, as a mostly Cattle Dog, he was assertive and controlling. When Shane attempted to voice his objections, Luke let him know that he would brook no resistance. Shane, a Shepherd/Husky mix, also had an assertive personality, so rather than backing down in the face of Luke's assertions of dominance, he fought back. Neither dog was willing to say "Lassie," and so the battles escalated.

In contrast, we later introduced Shane to a somewhat timid but playful four-month-old Lab puppy. Dunkin also attempted to mount Shane in puppy playfulness. But when Shane snapped at Dunkin, the pup backed off apologetically; in a short time the two were playing together, with only occasional puppy attempts to mount, which were quickly quelled by a dirty look from the older dog. No harm, no foul.

Similarly, you will need to work harder to convince your adult, well-practiced dog to quit climbing on other dogs than you will a young pup, and there's more potential for aggression if the recipient of unwanted attentions objects.

With both young and mature dogs, you can use time-outs to let your dog know that mounting behavior makes all fun stop. A tab (short, 4- to 6-inch piece of leash) or a drag-line (a 4- to 6-foot light nylon cord) attached to your dog's collar can make enforcement of time-outs faster and more effective when you have to separate dogs - as well as safer.

Set your dog up for a play date with an understanding friend who has an understanding dog. Try to find a safely fenced but neutral play yard, so that home team advantage doesn't play a role. If a neutral yard isn't available, the friend's yard is better than your own, and outdoors is definitely preferable to indoors.

When you turn the dogs out together, watch yours closely. It's a good idea to have some tools on hand to [break up a fight \(/issues/5_12/features/How-to-Break-Up-a-Dogfight_5505-1.html\)](/issues/5_12/features/How-to-Break-Up-a-Dogfight_5505-1.html), should one occur.

If there's no sign of mounting, let them play. Be ready to intervene if you see the beginning signs of mounting behavior in your dog. This usually occurs as play escalates and arousal increases, if it didn't happen at the get-go.

As a first line of defense, try subtle body-blocking. Every time your dog approaches the other with obvious mounting body postures, step calmly in front of your dog to block him. If you're skilled, you may be able to simply lean your body forward or thrust out a hip or knee to send him the message that the fun's about to stop. This is more likely to work with a younger dog, who is likely to be less intense about his intent to mount. Be sure not to intervene if your dog appears to be planning appropriate canine play.

If body blocking doesn't work, as gently and unobtrusively as possible, grasp your tab or light line, then cheerfully announce, "Time out!" and lead your dog to a quiet corner of the play yard. Sit with him there until you can tell that his arousal level has diminished, and then release him to return to his playmate. If

necessary, have your friend restrain her dog at the same time so he doesn't come pestering yours during the time out.

Keep in mind that the earlier you intervene in the mounting behavior sequence, the more effective the intervention, since your dog has not had time to get fully involved in the behavior. Also, it's important that you stay calm and cheerful about the modification program. Yelling at or physically correcting your dog increases the stress level in the environment, making a fight more likely, not less.

With enough repetitions, most dogs will give up the mounting, at least for the time being. With an older dog for whom the habit is well ingrained, you may need to repeat your time-outs with each new play session, and you may need to restrict his playmates to those who won't take offense to his persistently rude behavior. With a pup or juvenile, the behavior should extinguish fairly easily with repeated time outs, especially if he is neutered. Just keep an eye out for "spontaneous recovery," when a behavior you think has been extinguished returns unexpectedly. Quick re-intervention with body blocks or time-outs should put the mounting to rest again.



Some dogs get overexcited and physically accost people when greeting. The owner should work on a basic "good manners" greeting, using a short leash or tether to prevent the dog from greeting the person unless he's politely sitting down.

Does Your Dog Only Hump Humans?

This embarrassing behavior is handled much the same way as dog-dog mounting. One difference is that you must educate your guests as to how they should respond if your dog attempts his inappropriate behavior.

Another difference is that some dogs will become aggressive if you physically try to remove them from a human leg or other body part. It works best to set up initial training sessions with friends who agree to be human mounting posts for training purposes, rather than relying on "real" guests to respond promptly and appropriately, at least until your dog starts to get the idea.

For your average, run-of-the-mill human mounting, ask your guests to stand up and walk away if your dog attempts to get too cozy. Explain that it is not sexual behavior, but rather attention-seeking, and anything they try to do to talk him out of it will only reinforce the behavior and make it worse. You can also use a light line here, to help extricate your friends from your dog's embrace, and to give him that oh-so-useful "Time out!" If the behavior is too disruptive, you can tether the dog in the room where you are socializing, so he still gets to be part of the social experience without repeatedly mugging your guests.

If your dog becomes aggressive when thwarted, he should be shut safely away in his crate when company comes. Social hour is not an appropriate time to work on aggressive behavior - it puts your guests at risk, and prevents all of you from being able to relax and enjoy the occasion.

If your dog becomes growly, snappy, or otherwise dangerous when you try to remove him from a human, you are dealing with serious challenge and control behavior. You would be wise to work with a good behavior consultant who can help you stay safe while you modify this behavior. The program remains essentially the same – using time outs to take away the fun every time the behavior happens – but may also involve the use of muzzles, and perhaps [pharmaceutical intervention](#) ([/issues/18_12/features/Canine-Anxiety-Will-Doggie-Downers-Keep-Your-Pup-at-Ease_21350-1.html](#)) with your veterinarian's assistance, if necessary.

Do Dogs Masturbate?

Dog owners are often surprised to discover that some dogs masturbate. Our diminutive Dusty discovered early in life that he was just the right height to stand over a raised human foot and engage in a little self-pleasuring if the person's legs were crossed. We squelched that behavior as soon as we realized what the heck he was doing.

There's no harm in it, as long as the objects used are reasonably appropriate (say, a washable stuffed animal that's his alone, as opposed to your favorite sofa cushions), and it doesn't become obsessive. Removing an inappropriate object or resorting to time outs can redirect the behavior to objects that are more acceptable.

I've also known dogs to engage in push-ups on carpeting as a way to enjoy self-stimulation. You can use the time out if your dog chooses to do it in front of your guests, or whenever he does it in the "wrong" room (such as on the living room Berber), and leave him alone when he's in the "right" room (such as on the indoor-outdoor carpet on the back porch).

If your dog practices the behavior to a degree that appears obsessive – a not uncommon problem in some animals, especially in zoos – then you may need some help with behavior modification.

A behavior is generally considered obsessive when it causes harm to the animal or interferes with his ability to lead a normal life. If your dog is rubbing himself raw on the Berber carpet, or spends hours each day having fun in the bedroom, that's obsessive behavior. There are behavior modification programs that can help with [canine obsessive/compulsive disorders](#) ([/issues/13_9/features/Dogs-With-OCD_20062-1.html](#)), and they often require pharmaceutical intervention, especially if the obsession is well-developed.

Other Ways to Modify Humping Behavior

In addition to specific behavior modification programs for mounting behavior, a "Say Please" program can be an important key to your ultimate success. No, we're not suggesting you allow your dog to do inappropriate mounting if he says "please" first! A Say Please program requires that he perform a deferent behavior, such as "sit," before he gets any good stuff, like dinner, treats, petting, or going outside. This helps create structure in the pack, and constantly reminds him that you are in charge and in control of all the good stuff. Since a fair amount of mounting has to do with control, Say Please is right on target.

"Good Manners" classes are also of benefit when you are mounting your defense against your mounting dog's behavior. If he's trained to respond promptly to cues, the ["ask for an incompatible behavior"](#) ([/issues/12_7/features/Unwanted-Demand-Behavior-In-Canine_16139-1.html](#)) technique can serve to minimize mounting. If you see your dog approaching a guest with a gleam in his eye, your "Go to your place" cue will divert him to his rug on the opposite side of the room. He can't "Down" and mount a leg at the same time. Nor can he do push-ups on the rug if he is responding to your request for a "Sit."

If you start early and are consistent about discouraging your dog's inappropriate mounting, you should be successful in making the embarrassing behavior go away.

Pat Miller, WDJ's Training Editor, is a Certified Pet Dog Trainer, and past president of the Board of Directors of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers. She is also the author of, The Power of Positive Dog Training and, Positive Perspectives: Love Your Dog, Train Your Dog.

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Comments (16)

I am going to query the study done in 1976 that showed an "80% decrease in mounting behavior following castration". What were the protocols used? How many dogs and what ages, etc.? There are a lot of different factors that need to be considered here.

In my experience working with this behavioral issue, I see the humping problem mostly in neutered males and spayed females. Some were de-sexed early in life, so I am not convinced that de-sexing at a young age is really beneficial in this respect, while it may have some serious side effects on the well being and health of the dog.

Posted by: Wallaby | November 18, 2017 1:47 AM

Oh! I landed here looking for "dog trying to assert dominance" :) My 7 months old puppy humped his pillow since he was 3 months old! I always stopped the behavior when I catch it. At the dog park, I noticed he is asserting dominance towards dogs that act scared in the playground (I have to mention I'm talking about an 11 lbs dachshund...). He started with humping behavior that I ALWAYS stop and now moved from this one to ear biting. So trying to find an answer towards this new one. It's sad to see people "fixing" their dogs at an early age because Vets recommend it. Wish people would read more about the research and health issues linked to early neutering and breed specifics. Can't believe that as a side note this article recommends early neutering to eliminate humping... My dog humps since he was almost 3 months old. That says it all. Outraged about these "specialists" opinions

Posted by: simonaint | September 15, 2017 1:02 PM

My dog was neutered at an early age and I didn't have any problems. He does have a life size Bernese mt, dog I bought at Costco and that is his stress reliever. The dog is laying down and so he has no problem "mounting" him and humping away. That is the only thing he has ever humped so I am happy with that if it removes stress from his life or he just enjoys doing that. He was a very happy well adjusted dog and had no bad habits and I loved him dearly.

Posted by: Knyles | April 5, 2017 3:16 PM

I have an intact, extremely energetic and "busy" female, 15 month old English Cocker Spaniel. Because of the hard northeaster winter and work demands (alas, Christmas is my busy season at work and the kennel club where we train is on hiatus until January) I don't have a lot of time or energy to devote to training or play. When I am home, sitting on the couch, she will bring her favorite stuffed animal and sit next to it and "air hump" it. I am thinking that this is clearly a stress reliever for her because she would rather I get off the couch and devote some time to her but I simply don't have

the energy. She never humps anything at any other time. My response is to firmly but kindly redirect her and it seems to work. This is the only time and circumstances when she performs this behavior and she has done it since she was about 5 months old. I am not spaying her until she is two at the advice of her breeder.

Posted by: Mel Blacke | December 11, 2016 5:08 AM

Another thing to consider is bladder infections, or irritation under the prepuce.

Posted by: Jenny H | November 12, 2016 1:06 AM

After all of us seem to be on one page, I hope that Pat will write a response to explain her point of view.

Posted by: Wolfy | October 31, 2016 12:03 PM

So glad to see I wasn't the only one appalled by the advice to neuter so young, and as one of the other commentators said, after that comment I didn't put much trust in anything else the writer had to say. I was also a little surprised that she is a certified trainer given her use of 'pack' and 'dominance', words that followers of a certain tv personality use...

Posted by: Bergers | October 30, 2016 10:23 PM

I find the suggestion of early desexing completely irresponsible, not only does it have an adverse effect on the dogs development but it doesn't guarantee eliminating humping. I have a 3 yr old (spayed after she was fully matured) female that constantly reverts to humping. She does it to me and will try it on my other dog...also female. I believe it's more a dominance issue than seeking attention as the author has suggested.

Posted by: Iceypro@hotmail.com | October 30, 2016 8:39 PM

WOW. Just wow. Sterilizing at 8 weeks is idiotic advice. How about proven facts that early sterilization has an adverse affect on tendons/ligaments later in life? Especially in sport dogs? Or, how about forced height in certain breeds due to irresponsible early neuter? Of course, do it "just in case" he may be a humper. God forbid the human should train behaviors, not just manage, to the detriment of the dog. How about more research by this "writer", especially out of europe. American vets are always behing in areas where changing protocols affect their bottom line. This article really hurt WDJ on so many levels. Don't let this writer submit again. What a crock!!#!!!!

Posted by: A.S.H. | October 30, 2016 8:29 PM

I agree with wolfy dog's comment posted above for Oct. 30, 2016:

"Pat, I cannot believe you wrote and advised the following "Just one more strong argument for juvenile sterilization, between the ages of eight weeks and six months, rather than waiting for your dog to mature." Research has proven over and over again that this early neutering has an averse effect on a dog's health, bone structure and even causes more aggressive behavior towards intact males."

I recently adopted a giant breed hound that the previous "owners" had neutered at 6 months because their vet advised them it would stop the "puppy" behaviors. That vet had absolutely no idea about the health and growth factors relating to giant breed dogs. Now this sweet hound has a much greater chance of bone cancer and other diseases because an ill-educated vet and a "follow-like-sheep" couple failed to consult the breeder or follow the breeder's specific guidelines concerning the proper age at which to spay or neuter if necessary.

Like one other commentator above, I could not take much of the rest of this article seriously after reading your comment on neutering/spaying.

Posted by: MeinVT | October 30, 2016 12:03 PM

Pat, I cannot believe you wrote and advised the following "Just one more strong argument for juvenile sterilization, between the ages of eight weeks and six months, rather than waiting for your dog to mature." Research has proofed over and over again that this early neutering has an averse effect on a dog's health, bone structure and even causes more aggressive behavior towards intact males.

Like one other commentator I stopped taking this article seriously after reading this quote. It is a shame that shelter neuter puppies at 7 -8 weeks and many breeders of the designer dog (mutts) like Labradoodles and xxxxdoodles. Taking charge of an OCD humping dog works. It doesn't have to be mean but you need consistency and immediate removal with the command "Oh No!" from the social setting. That has worked great for me and the male dogs who did it without neutering them Too many times we resprtt to surgery in order to fix or prevent a problem. Regarding masturbation: I had a GSD who did this; air humping and ejaculating, once in a car show room so I had to take him outside in the rain to cool off. He would do it at home in the morning when I took him out of his crate, then I left him outside and brought him back when he was :done". It only lasted a few months until he had his hormones in sinc. Among the male dog he encountered he was the most secure and easy going, compared to many neutered males who challenged him. Male dogs have a too crazy reputation. People need to get over their anthropomorphism and sexual shame and see dogs for who they are. Never expected this form you or the WDJ. Isn't it about the WHOLE dog?

Posted by: Wolfy | October 30, 2016 11:22 AM

I stopped reading this article when I got to the bit about early neutering. Frankly, I don't trust anything else this writer has to say after that. Given your editorial support of appropriate neutering and spaying, I'm very surprised you let this get through. It makes me question the overall quality of reporting and makes me question my subscription.

Do you not have editorial standards? Doesn't someone vet articles before you publish them?

Posted by: kskinct | October 30, 2016 9:28 AM

I often find your articles useful and informative, as I do for much of this one - I often share your stories with the followers of my kennel page, but I won't be sharing this one because of the advice given about neutering dogs "between the ages of eight weeks and six months" - research has PROVEN that there is a real downside to spay/neuter, especially when it's done before sexual maturity - neutering a male puppy so young will very likely cause abnormal skeletal growth and increase the chances of muscular and/or bone injuries - many other problems have an increased chance of occurring after s/n, especially if it's done before sexual maturity - the AVMA has issued a statement saying that s/n is mostly done for the convenience of the owner - to put a pup at risk of compromised health for a problem so easily corrected by training is not something that I'm willing to advise to my followers

Posted by: Al Magaw | October 30, 2016 8:44 AM

I have a question. I adopted an intact male bulldog approx. 5 years old about 3 mos. ago. I didn't think his not being fixed would be an issue because he has no way of running into any females and haven't had him fixed yet. But he's a humper and unfortunately I'm the one he goes after. Now I know why the previous owners daughters were so glad to see this dog leave..

I've had male dogs before that have done that and a simple 'stop' or 'get down' worked.. Not with this one. He get's aggressive and he's so strong and focused that seriously, it's like dealing with a human. He even went after my husband when my husband yelled at him. As he snapped at my husband I got up quickly and left the room. This is the first dog I've ever had that I've been afraid of. So my question is.. do you think it will do any good to get him neutered at his age? Another problem is getting him into the car to go to the vets. If he doesn't want to move, he'll snap and growl. I don't know what to do with this dog.

Posted by: RoscoesMom | September 16, 2016 1:02 PM

Hi Samantha80. This article gives some great advice. Have you tried neutering him? Role playing with another dog? A great place to start is observing and writing down what happens before, during, and after the incident to best determine why he is humping. It could be because he is anxious and uses humping as a form of comfort and just needs to learn a new way to comfort himself. It could be that he is posturing for another dog. It may be hard to see a correlation without keeping a little journal and writing down all you see and then comparing and contrasting your findings off of multiple instances. Once you find out why then you can work on how best to go about fixing it. ;)

Posted by: Fluffy | November 20, 2015 11:50 AM

Hello everybody, I have a big problem. I took my puppy from a dog foster home about a year ago. I love him to bits; he has a great personality, and I feel that he loves our family so much. BUT, he humps a lot. How to stop it? My husband and I were thinking about taking him to 'doggy school', but then again, it's extremely expensive, and the nearest 'doggy school' is far away from us. Maybe you have some advice? THANK YOU!!!!

Posted by: Samantha80 | November 8, 2015 8:30 PM