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## **DEALING WITH THE PROBLEM OF STOOL EATING (COPROPHAGIA)**

Sometimes it can happen where a dog decides to eat his own or another's fecal matter. This is not only a very undesirable behavior but can be a health risk to the dog. Some of the causes of this problem include:

1. He may have a medical problem that prevents the absorption of nutrients, causing gastrointestinal upset, or causing poor digestion of food. These may cause the dog to resort to stool eating.
2. If the dog is taking medication or has a medical problem that causes an increase in appetite (i.e.: any treatment involving steroids, diabetes, thyroid disease, Cushing's disease), he may resort to stool eating.
3. The dog may be underfed.
4. The dog may be experiencing malnutrition and/or vitamin and mineral deficiencies due to a poor quality dog food which can cause him to eat additional things.
5. The dog is being given too many treats during the day. He may be too full for his meal time and he doesn't finish his food, which could lead to malnutrition and / or vitamin deficiencies and an increased appetite at varying times causing him to look for food.
6. If the dog is being kept in too small of an area or if the owners don't clean out their runs often enough, this can lead to stool eating.
7. He may be bored and investigate his feces, play with it, and possibly eat it.

Once it is determined what the cause is, what do you do about it?

If you suspect a medical issue, have the dog examined by a vet including a complete physical exam with a fecal exam and the frequency of bowel movements.

If it is a situation where the dog is underfed, consult with your vet on the amount of food your dog should be fed or check the recommendations on the dog food bag.

If it is a malnutrition/vitamin deficiency problem, consider a premium kibble that is more digestible or gets its protein from a different source. Also, limit the amount of treats and feed the proper amount of food at designated times. The owners can also consider feeding several times in a day to make sure the dog is getting the nutrition he needs and isn't getting too hungry between meal times. Dogs on a low calorie diet may do well on a high bulk or high fiber formula kibble dog food.

Stool eating that originates from the dog being in an area too small and/or stools not being picked up frequently enough can be easy to solve. Even if the owners are unable to provide a larger area for the dog, they just need to make adjustments by keeping track of the dog's elimination and feeding schedules, which can cause the dog to produce two stools per day. One would be in the morning before the owners leave for work and one when the owners arrive home in the evening. This will give the opportunity to pick up the stool immediately

thus taking care of the problem. Owners must remember to not pick it up in front of the dog as this draws attention to the item you want the dog to ignore.

If the stool eating originates from boredom, this can be easy to correct. Interactive toys such as boomer balls, buster cubes, and Busy Buddy Toys as well as varying different chew toys and toys with hidden food treats such as a Kong toy will aid in providing entertainment for the dog when he is by himself. Also, make sure the dog has enough exercise before putting him away in his area will aid in solving the problem. Remember the old phrase “A tired dog is a good dog”.

To have the dog ignore the stool altogether, an alternate behavior must be taught. First, the owner must be able to predict when the dog will eliminate. This can be done by developing a stool schedule which is done by confining the dog in an area that is small enough that he cannot eliminate in it. Next, tether the dog to something while he is eating his meal. Feed the exact same food at the exact same time each day. Once the dog is finished eating, walk the dog to his potty place every 15 minutes until he defecates. If he does not go within 5 minutes of taking him there, remove him from the spot, re-tether him, and continue the process until he goes. At the first sign of sniffing or investigating the stool, the dog should be interrupted (don't scare him) then asked to perform an obedience cue or one of the tricks he knows and reward him with something he really likes. The key is to have the owner present immediately following each defecation. This way the dog can be interrupted 100% of the time and the alternate behavior of performing the obedience cue or trick be rewarded and the alternate behavior taught. The owner should keep a daily potty log of when the dog eliminates which will allow them to predict about when the dog will need to eliminate. After about two weeks, the dog can be given some of his freedom back and the owner should monitor the dog 30 minutes before and after the time the dog is due to eliminate so he can interrupt any stool eating.

There are a several products available through a vet that can also treat stool eating. One of the most common is Forbid which is a powder that is placed in the dog's food and makes the stool unpalatable. For multiple dog households, each dog's food must get Forbid. Digestive enzymes such as those in a meat tenderizer (like A1 Steak Sauce) can help with the digestion of protein and produce a less palatable stool. To use this, the owner should moisten the food first then apply the product allowing it to sit for 10 to 15 minutes.

Being that stool eating can be self-rewarding to a dog, consistency in dealing with this problem is very important. However, there are some dogs that are die-hard stool eaters that will not be cured with any of these techniques and these dogs should be checked out by a vet for possible pancreatic issues.