



Coprophagia

Coprophagia is the medical term for when a dog eats either its own faeces or that of another animal.

This behaviour may be considered repulsive to us but it is natural for dogs.

It is instinctive for a nursing bitch to clean up their puppies faeces and urine in their the first 3-5 weeks. The pup can see the mother stimulating and eating the sibling's faeces. Sometimes the pup can see the owner picking up the faeces and copies this behaviour. A good reason to clean up when the pup is not present.

Research has shown that puppies gain useful nutrition from their faeces which is essential during their high energy growing phase.

Coprophagia is generally seen in puppies and **once they stop growing they usually stop this behaviour**. However, occasionally they continue for a variety of reasons:

- The behaviour has become habit forming.
- Essential nutrients are missing from their diet.
- The dog is hungry.
- The dog is bored; evidence suggests that kennel kept dogs or dogs that spend most of the day on their own are more likely to be coprophagic.

Although this behaviour does not present much of a health risk to its owner and only a marginally increased risk of infection by parasites, it is a behaviour that repels most owners and is there better treated.

If you are sure that eating faeces it not caused by any of the above reasons and believe it is a health issue, you should take your dog to a vet for as check up in case they aren't absorbing enough nutrients due to parasites, or they have issues with their pancreas.

Treatment

Diet

Check your dog is receiving a nutritionally balanced diet and is fed at interval appropriate to your dogs age.

Supervision

If the behaviour has become a habit, it is necessary to closely supervise your dog to break the habit. If it eats it's own faeces it should be distracted immediately after it has defecated with either a treat to lure it away or the offer of a game. If it eats other faeces it should be closely watched and similarly distracted. If necessary, walks should be on an extended lead and if necessary the dog should be muzzled until the habit is broken.

Punishment is ineffective as most dogs continue with the behaviour when out of site. You should also avoid running after your dog when you see this behaviour as the dog will see this as a game.

Prevention rather than cure is the ideal for coprophagia. This is achieved by a well balanced diet, the removal of faeces from your garden, supervision on walks, and the provision of toys, company etc.