

Why Do Dogs Eat Poop? Understanding Canine Coprophagia And How To Stop It

Speaker Key

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Transcript

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If you could think of all of the habits or antics that your puppy or dog could do that might embarrass you in front of your friends and family, what might they be? What would be the first thing that would come to your mind?

It could be maybe a puppy that pees on your neighbor's carpet or your family member's carpet. And that could be a little bit embarrassing. It could be your dog humping your guests as they come through the front door. Sure, that could be a little embarrassing.

I think one at or near the top of things your dog could do to embarrass you might be eating poop. Eating their own poop, eating other dog's poop, eating poop. That's got to be at the top, right? Well, today we're going to talk about that topic and what that might mean about your dog and how you can overcome that problem.

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I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. A dog eating poop, it's called coprophagia. And that's a big fancy name to basically say your dog eats poop. Now, some dogs love to eat other dogs' poop. Some dogs like to eat their own poop. A lot of dogs like to eat other animal poops. But today we're talking about dogs who eat their own poop or a dog that lives with them, their poop.

And there's really three categories of reasons why this might be happening to your dog. And what I want you to think about as we do in many of these episodes is I want you to consider a reframe on what's happening.

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So, you might say, "Ew, that's disgusting. Why do you like the taste of poop? Why are you doing that?" I want you to consider that your dog doesn't like the taste of it. "Well, that's weird. Why would he do it?" I think there's three categories of reasons why he might be doing.

Number one, it could be curiosity. If you have a young puppy, it's novel. "What's this? Oh, my goodness." So, it could just be something to play with. It could be something they put in their mouth. It could just be a phase of curiosity that they're going through.

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The second reason could be a health reason in that it is a gut biome problem. It could be a mineral or a vitamin or some bacteria, some microbe that their body is missing. And innately their body tells them 'You should eat that.' And it's not because it tastes good because it's serving a purpose for them.

And the third purpose could be a behavior. It could be the stress, anxiety. It could be a response to being punished for potty accidents that builds up anxiety or stress for that dog or puppy. And so, there's poop in the house.

They know you get mad when there's poop in the house. Now, I don't think this is very common reason that dogs might eat it in response to that, but that is a suggested reason for dogs eating this. By far, I believe that the biggest reason is nutritional.



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Now, why do I ask you to reframe this? You might be saying, "Susan, I just want it to stop. I don't need to know why." But the why is important because just getting it to stop, you might buy one of those commercial products, which by the way, please don't do it, that they tell you put this on the poop, and it'll make the poop taste bad.

Well, those commercial products often don't work anyway. And they often have things like wheat gluten and MSG, things that many of us avoid, so why would we have our dogs eat them? But the main reason why I want you to get out of the mindset of 'Susan, make it stop', because I want you to be open to the fact that your dog's behavior is feedback that can help you be a better guardian for that dog.

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In that, what if the dog is missing something? And I'm going to tell you, when my now [one year old Border Collie](#) came home, he would eat any poop he could find. Now, I would take him out on leash, so he didn't find a lot and we clean up the yard. He was like a magnet. It was like, "Yeah, this is what I should be doing now. I should be eating this poop."

It wasn't like, 'I'm going to have a leisurely pull on some grass or something.' It was like, 'Oh yeah, this is what I need to do.' And so, I immediately took that as feedback. Wow. I've never seen a puppy do that. Now, it could be for a number of different reasons. He came from a very big litter, 10 puppies.

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I did check and there was at least one other puppy who was doing the same thing. It could be maybe the food that he was raised on didn't necessarily give him what he needed for his microbiome, or it was a very well-balanced processed food, but possibly his gut was lacking something that he could get the vitamins and nutrients that he needed out of that processed food.

And so, whether it was something lacking in him or lacking in his diet, because I looked at what he was doing with curiosity, not with, "Oh my God, that's the most disgusting thing I've ever seen.", although that thought did go through my mind. I then got curious and went online and started researching what might be the reason and what can I do?

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And it led me to a product by a company called Adored Beast. It's a Canadian company and they had a product called [Soil & Sea](#). And I think there's a lot of clay in this product, but it's a probiotic for the puppy. Within 48 hours, he had no interest in eating poop. And I kept him on that probiotic, and I changed them to a different one that my other dogs are on probably six months later.

And guess what? Just four days ago, I saw him eat poop again. He never as much as smelled it. So, it was just a ding-ding, "Susan, get some more of that Adored Beast product." Because clearly the probiotic that I was feeding the rest of the dog wasn't working for him.

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So, it's nothing to do with the food that I'm feeding him. It probably has to do with, still a young dog, how his gut biome is processing the food that I'm giving him.

Now for wherever you're living in the world, you might want to look up that Adored Beast product, look at the ingredients, and see if there's another company that has a similar type of product that you can buy if you have a dog that is eating poop.



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Or just share this as information for any friend or family member that has a dog who's doing this. Now, a lot of times, if that behavior of 'Oh my gosh, my dog's eating poop.' is met with 'What are you doing? You stop.' and you kind of lose yourself on the dog because you think it's a disgusting act because—well, it kind of is a disgusting act, isn't it?

But we don't judge our dogs. We just get that data that they're giving us, and we make changes. But in the midst of it, you might be going, "Ah no, don't do that." So, you can change your dog's behavior that they're not eating poop. It would take a lot of, 'Oh my gosh, stop it, drop it, don't do that.'

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But what you likely are only teaching your dog, 'Don't hunt for poop when I'm watching.' And they'll learn to get sneaky. 'I see one, I'm not going for it. I'll circle back. She's not looking, I circle back, I'm going to get it then.' Alright so, you don't want to try to correct the dog in any way for eating poop as disgusting as it is. You've got to take in mind that this is feedback.

Alright so, I mentioned it could be behavioral, it could be related to stress or anxiety. So, we don't want to add more stress or anxiety to it. What can we do? Number one, take your dog out on leash. I know it's a bit of a pain for you right now, but let's just do that. Number two, you could amp up your [ItsYerChoice game](#).

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But honestly, if the dog has an imbalance in their system, all the ItsYerChoice in the world isn't going to help them. You need to help solve that imbalance. But taking the dog out on leash and making sure you're taking them into an area that is clean, free of poop.

So, if you're going to a neighborhood park and you want your dog to potty, you might need to pick up the random poops of the other people, which that's being a good Samaritan. And you know, you get big karma points for picking up somebody else's poop.

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And if you're one of the people whose dog pooped and didn't get picked up, come on, do better. So, management is a big part of helping your dog go through this phase, especially if it's of a curiosity phase. But if that curiosity phase is meant with, 'What are you doing? You better stop it.' You now are giving reinforcement to the dog's curiosity of picking up poop.

And you could say, "Well Susan, I'm yelling at the dog. I'm telling him, no. I'm trying to let him know he's bad." But what the [dog is getting is attention from you](#) and you're coming and running at him, and he's going to bounce around and play a little keep away.

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So, you just don't want to go the punishment route when your dog is eating poop. We want to help alleviate the problem, so it doesn't happen again. So, one of the things that I do is I get my dog's gut biome tested, and I do hair analysis on my dogs every year just to see if there's things that are missing that they aren't getting from the diet that they're getting fed.

So, I like to use [Dr. Dobias for the hair analysis](#). And there's a company in the US called [VDI Labs](#) that will do the gut biome testing for your dog. And there are others, but that's one that I can confidently recommend. So, if you really want to help your dog through this rather embarrassing habit that they have, it's going to take management on your part, but also seek to help them.



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Make sure that you're feeding them as fresh, as close to a natural diet as you can. If you're feeding processed dog food like kibble, then I would recommend you at least change the brand of kibble or add some fresh ingredients to that diet that includes a pre or probiotic to help with their gut biome.

There is an answer. You just have to continue to be curious because we want to be the best for our dogs, right? And being the best means not blaming them for an act, but saying, 'What can I learn from what's happening here? And how can I make the situation better?'

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Now, if you have a dog who's been doing this for years, there's a chance it can all go away suddenly. One of my past dogs, Encore, who lived to be 17, she had a tick-borne infection that we really didn't know about. I suspected it, but she really didn't get the proper treatment she needed until she collapsed with a seizure at the age of eight.

And long story short, she started eating poop like mad the year or two leading up to that. Out of the blue, didn't eat poop in her life. But as a six-year-old, we used to say she was like a detection dog for poop.

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You could clean the yard really easy cause you could just follow Encore around. She would tell you where all the poop was. But lo and behold, years after we finally got her on the proper treatment that she needed. It didn't happen overnight.

I think if I knew about trying different probiotics and changing her gut biome, it might've happened a lot sooner. But eventually guess what, she stopped eating poop. So, I believe it's a symptom of a problem. Is it a behavioral problem or is it a physical problem?

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It's yours to investigate and find the right solution. And I know the chance of your dog stopping that kind of disgusting behavior of eating poop is a possibility for both of you. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Learn How To Play ItsYerChoice

[ItsYerChoice Summit](#)

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 243: Training My New Puppy, What He Knows So Far: Susan Garrett's Plan And Puppy Schedule](#)

[Soil & Sea | Primordial Pre & Probiotics](#)

[Hair Analysis: Dr. Dobias](#)

[Gut Biome Testing: VDI Laboratory](#)

[Podcast Episode 205: The Hidden World Of Reinforcement For Dogs And Why You Need To Know](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Feeding Dogs, Training Treats, Dog Food, Nutrition and Canine Behavior, Raw Diets with Susan Garrett](#)



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About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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