



Birchwood
Animal Hospital

~ for the love of animals since 1959 ~

BIRCHWOOD ANIMAL HOSPITAL

2595 Portage Avenue

Winnipeg, MB | R3J 0P5

www.birchwoodvet.com | birchwood@mymts.net

(204) 832-1368 | Fax (204) 889-9708

Coprophagia - Stool Eating

This is a common complaint that dog owners bring to their veterinarian, obviously because the act of eating stool is very repugnant to us. Dogs, however, consider this to be normal behaviour.

Stool eating in the dog is not a disease and is not related to deficiency in the diet. The exact opposite may be true, that is, the diet is too rich in carbohydrate or starch and is producing stool that still is nutrient rich and tasty to the dog. The extreme situation of a malnourished dog, one that is not getting enough to eat, could conceivably produce stool-eating behaviour as well. Other reasons given for stool-eating in the dog are:

1. It is an **inherited trait**, highly developed in some puppies. Most of these puppies should grow out of this behaviour.
2. It is **play behaviour** - when the stools become hard, as occurs with freezing in the winter, the dog is more likely to play with and occasionally eat the stool.
3. It is **exploratory behaviour**, particularly in puppies.
4. It is **conditioned behaviour**. We as owners, encourage the behaviour because we tend to interact with the dog whenever it occurs. We talk to the dog, get upset with it, start picking up the stool and so on. From the dog's point of view, this means more attention and time spent with his/her owner and this is exactly what every dog wants.

So, how do we get rid of the behaviour?

Firstly, if we think it may have a dietary basis, do the following:

- Give a consistent diet - no table food or treats!
- Feed twice daily on a regular schedule.
- Make sure you are feeding enough food.
- Reduce the carbohydrate level in the diet, increase the protein and possibly the fat.



Secondly, you must prevent all access to the stool or you must make the stools aversive (unappealing) to the dog. Most animal behaviourists recommend preventing access to the stool as your best bet for success. You can do this by having the dog wear a muzzle whenever he goes outside to defecate. Alternatively, you can always keep the dog on a leash so that you are with the dog at all times when he/she is defecating. Then you distract him/her from the stool and pick it up and dispose of it immediately. Some owners can even train their dog to defecate on command.

Products are available to make the stools unpleasant. *For-Bid™* is an example of a common commercial product that is fed to the dog to make the stools taste bad. Other suggestions are adding MSG to the food or feeding Certs to the dog. The appropriate amount of the products given is determined by trial and error.

Alternatively, you can doctor up the stools by sprinkling Tabasco sauce, hot pepper or any other unpleasant (non-toxic) edible substance on the stools; but it is felt that this approach rarely works. As a last resort, a person can cause the dog to have soft stools so that the dog cannot pick it up to ingest it. To emphasize again; this is a last resort!

In closing, your best bet to control this problem is to feed a good quality, balanced diet on a regular schedule and prevent your dog from having access to his/her stool.

