

Coprophagy

While the ingestion of feces is normal in some species such as rabbits, and under certain circumstances in dogs (nursing mothers stimulating newborns to defecate/nest maintenance), most dog owners find this behavior “difficult to swallow”

Possible causes include behavioral/environmental (carryover of juvenile or maternal behaviors, boredom, confinement in close quarters) as well as medical conditions (parasitism, nutritional deficiencies, maldigestion/malabsorption of nutrients, or any cause of excessive appetite such as diabetes, adrenal gland disorders or certain medications such as prednisone). Perhaps the high stress and close kennel confinement experienced by racing greyhounds as well as dietary imbalances in homemade track rations contribute to the frequency of coprophagy in this breed.

Problems associated with coprophagy include severe halitosis (bad breath), parasite transmission and bacterial/viral infection.

After ruling out medical causes, the treatment of this problem may involve dietary changes (using a high quality/highly digestible ration, feeding two or three smaller meals versus one large daily meal), prompt cleanup and disposal of stools in the yard, more frequent walks and periods of interaction with the owner and other dogs to avoid boredom, and using various substances to create an offensive taste in the stool.

A product called FOR-BID™ is available through your veterinarian and can be added to the dog’s food for a short period, often curbing coprophagy for months. Another method is to inject a small amount (1/4-1/2tsp.) of bitter apple **into** the stool to elicit an aversive sensation when ingested. Spraying the surface of the stool is unlikely to be as effective.

Once started, the habit of coprophagy can be difficult to break. Difficult cases are best discussed with your veterinarian or a canine behavior specialist.