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Coprophagia
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There can be few things worse than being greeted by a dog that has just dined on dog faeces or seeing your dog making a beeline for the cat tray to clean up the cat faeces left by your cat after it has visited the cat box. Poo breath is not a pleasant thing to be greeted with.

This behaviour of eating faeces is called coprophagia. It is a very frustrating behaviour to stop because dogs seem to enjoy eating faeces and the more we moan at them to stop the more they do it. The reason why it is difficult to stop dogs from dining on dog patties and cat smarties is that coprophagia is a natural behaviour for dogs. Bitches clean up the faeces of puppies to keep the den clean and dogs are scavengers and faeces are utilized by scavengers as a food source.

Intestinal parasites are the only health risk associated with coprophagia in dogs because the acidic pH of the canine stomach will inactivate any pathogens swallowed with the faeces. However poo breath of a dog that has just dined on faeces can put a huge strain on the human animal bond. For this reason it is important to treat any cases of coprophagia.

There are a number of medical and behavioural causes for coprophagia. The medical conditions are mainly caused by dogs not digesting and therefore not absorbing their food properly. This results in dogs excreting undigested food in the faeces making their faeces palatable for other dogs. The causes of this so called malabsorption mal digestion syndrome can be as a result of parasite infection in the gut of a dog or the dog may not be secreting sufficient enzymes to digest their food. Therefore it is very important to take the dog whose faeces are being eaten to a vet for a clinical exam to exclude any medical reasons for their faeces being eaten.

There are many behavioural causes for coprophagia. These include boredom. Many dog breeds were originally bred to perform a job. However these days most dogs live in a yard and are not given a job to do. So they relieve their boredom by eating faeces and often this causes a reaction from the owner. The owner will often get angry with the dog and so the dog gets attention, even if this is negative attention it is still attention. Other causes include, using coprophagia to get attention from the owner, mimicking what its mother did, i.e. cleaning the den by eating faeces and a subordinate dog may eat the faeces of a more dominant dog. This is not an



exhaustive list of behavioural causes, therefore it is important to take the dog that is eating faeces to a vet to have the dog clinically examined and if no medical problem is found to then consult an animal behaviourist to try and work out why the dog is eating another dog's faeces, or its own faeces and the animal behaviourist can then give the owner advice to alter the environment of the dog and alter the way in which the owner and dog interact. This will go a long way into solving this problem.

The other things are dogs seem to find irresistible is cat faeces. The moment you let the dogs out in the morning they go straight for the area where the cat has gone to the toilet and dine on the faeces the cat has left behind. They can also often not wait to get to the cat box. Cat diets need to have a higher fat and protein content than dog diets. This can result in cat faeces being very palatable for dogs.

Solving this problem does involve an integrated approach and dedication from the owners. Firstly any medical causes for coprophagia need to be treated and it is also advisable for owners to consult with an animal behaviourist to get advice on managing any behavioural causes for coprophagia. In the case of a cat faeces being eaten owners need to try and put the cat box in a place that dogs can not get too and in the case of dog faeces being eaten the owners need to clear up faeces as often as possible to limit the access of the dog to faeces.

Then finally the dog needs to be persuaded that dog and cat faeces do not taste nice. This is done by making the faeces unpalatable for dogs. There are many remedies like putting curry powder or Tabasco sauce on the faeces. This will only work if every single pile of faeces is treated and some dogs have on occasion been known to develop a liking for chilli powder and Tabasco sauce. There is also anecdotal evidence that adding pineapple and monosodium glutamate to the food of the dogs makes their faeces unpalatable. However scientific proof of these methods is lacking.

Afrivet markets a product that will assist owners in changing the dietary preferences of their dog. The product is called Copronat and has been developed by a French company called Arcanatura. Copronat contains an extract of the *Yucca Schidigera* plant. This plant grows in the deserts of Arizona, California and Mexico in the USA. *Yucca Schidigera* extract works by binding Hydrogen Sulphide in the faeces. This is the gas that gives rotten eggs and faeces the bad smell. Binding Hydrogen Sulphide makes the faeces unpalatable to the dog.

Copronat is sprayed onto the food of the animal whose faeces is being eaten. Therefore if the cat's faeces is being eaten then the cat must be fed the Copronat and if the dog is eating dog faeces then the dog whose faeces is being eaten must be fed Copronat.

The dose of Copronat is 2ml(4 pump sprays) per 10 kg per day on the food of the animal whose faeces are being eaten. It is very important to make sure that the correct animal is being fed Copronat. If there are multiple dogs in the house and you are not sure whose faeces are being eaten then it is advisable to feed all the dogs Copronat and the same holds if the cat faeces are being eaten. If there are multiple cats in the house then all the cats need to be fed Copronat. It will take about 4 – 6

weeks for the dog to understand that the faeces that used to taste fabulous now tastes horrible as a result of the animal being fed Copronat. After that the dog should not go back to eating faeces.

However one thing that must be kept in mind when treating a coprophagia problem is that dogs do not generalize. So for example if your cat always uses a cat box and your dog always eats cat faeces from the cat box then Copronat will stop the dog from eating faeces from the cat box but if the cat or another cat then defecates in the garden the dog will most likely still eat the cat faeces that is in the garden. This is because the dog has learned that cat faeces in the cat box taste horrible but the dog will not generalize that to all cat faeces. I.e. cat faeces in the garden is still good to eat. This may also occur for example when the owner moves to another house. But if that happens then the Copronat course may need to be repeated.



ASK YOUR VET
DEDICATION PAYS OFF

Please speak to your vet about the use of Copronat to treat coprophagia. Alternatively you can also contact me at Afrivet head office on 012 991-6416.

