



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Canine Master on Pet Life Radio - Episode #5 Does Your Dog Eat Poop and Other Things?

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Hi, I'm your host Chris Onthank, and welcome to the Canine Master Radio Show. Today we're going to talk about poop eating, or something called coprophagia. And coprophagia is the behavior of where your dog is eating his own poop, or perhaps another dog's poop. This is an absolutely disgusting habit that many, many people experience every single day. So we're going to talk about that and how to fix it.

And the other thing we're going to talk about today is called Pica syndrome. Pica syndrome is when a dog actually consumes objects that aren't food. Things like, socks, and underwear, and rocks, and stones, and acorns. Pica syndrome is also a very real problem with dogs today. And I'm going to talk about how we fix these things, and make these things go away.

So what is coprophagia? Again, it's the consumption of feces of either of your own dog's feces or another dog's feces. It starts, it's an instinctual thing that dogs eat poop. Sounds disgusting, but many dogs love it. Sort of like eating, I don't know, for us like having pate or something.

When a mother has its puppies, what she'll do is in her den when she has ... You don't see this in a welcome box. She'll actually eat her puppies' poops to keep the den clean. She'll lick their anuses in order to clean them, or to stimulate them to go, actually, in some ways. While this is a normal, during this time, by the time the puppies grow up, the mother usually has stopped this act of eating the dog's poops, and the dogs develop their own den instincts where they go outside and go to the bathroom.

So what do we do in these situations? I'm going to talk about this, but first let's talk about some other reasons why dogs do this. Everybody today uses, for small dogs, they use wee-wee pads. And wee-wee pads can actually add to dogs eating their own poop. What happens is, the dog goes to the bathroom on the wee-wee pad and the dog leaves. And because instinctively dogs don't want to poop in their own den, they'll actually eat the poop

to cover it up. So wee-wee pads in many cases, will actually contribute to dogs eating their own poop.

So if you are going to use a wee-wee pad, make sure you put the wee-wee pad in a place in your apartment, or your house that's far away from the living quarters. The worst thing you can do is stick the wee-wee pad in the midst of where you're living, and that's going to make your puppy much more likely to eat its own poop.

There's also problems with dietary deficiencies, enzymes. People have thought for years, is it a dietary problem? Yeah, it could be. I think that it's not as common as some of the other reasons. I think that basically the dog's poop just tastes really good. It also comes from boredom. I think that sometimes when your dogs are bored and they see poop, they smell it, they eat it. It's another reason why dogs eat their own poop.

Here's the other thing that I will tell you never to do. When your dog goes to the bathroom outside, and then you quickly follow up with your pooper scooper and you clean it up, what do you think your dog is seeing? What do you think your dog is thinking that you're doing? Your dog is thinking, "Oh my gosh, my master wants the poop." So there you are cleaning it up and putting it in a bag and you're actually creating in a dog's mind, a scarce resource. So here we go quickly to pick up the poop and all of a sudden the dog is going, "Oh, they want the poop too. This poop must be great stuff. Let's all get over there and grab the poop." And then the dog of course gets over there and thinks this is a great idea.

So if you are pooper scooping your dog after he goes to the bathroom, what I recommend is doing it when your dog isn't in the same area. Now that's really hard. When you're on a leash and you're walking, and your dog is on a leash and he goes to the bathroom. What I try to tell people to do is just try to get your dog distracted onto something else. Don't be in a big rush to go and pick up the poop. Don't let your dog see, "Oh my God, he's rushing to get it." Because what happens is, again in the dog's mind is that you want the poop, you want to consume it, you want it. Everybody wants it, and it becomes that scarce resource.

So these are some of the reasons why dogs do eat their own poop. So another thing is people have come up with crazy ideas over the years, and I'll be honest with you, over the last 25 years of dog training, I have myself some pretty whacked out things to make poop eating go away. That by the way, many of them did not work.

Years ago we used to use a product called Accent. Accent was like an MSG product, and we used to sprinkle it in the dogs food. And what would happen was a dog would eat it and then it was supposed to make the poop taste bad when the dog went to eat it. Well, I never saw that work. There's another product that you can get from your veterinarian called Deter. I have tried that as well, and many of my clients have. It doesn't work. You put it on. I honestly think it makes the poop even taste better and they eat more. So Accent and Deter, this MSG thing is not a solution that I have found. I've never seen anybody having any success with that.

Another thing that you could do is, add hot sauce or red pepper sauce on to the poop in the yard. So if your dog goes outside and you put hot sauce and red pepper sauce. I have seen very little results with this, and I think actually it just doesn't work. I think that these two

options are just not things that you should try. I would go right onto the other things I want to talk about a little later.

Here's something that I did years ago. I had a client who's dog was eating its own poop. It was a Labrador Retriever and the people were going bananas. They gave me the dog, and they said, "Please, the dog is eating its own poop and it's driving me nuts." So I had heard of somebody using electric shock, and I hate electric shock by the way, but I put a shock collar on the dog. This goes back, maybe 15, 20 years ago. I put a shock collar on the dog and when the dog took his poop, that was great. And then when he went back to eat it, I gave him a little zap. Well, you know what? It worked once, it worked twice, and then the dog did a very peculiar behavior. He would poop. And right after he pooped, he'd jump away from the poop. But then later on he'd go right back and eat it again. So the electric idea is just a bad idea. And again, I'm not a proponent of electric shock anyway, so I'd stay away from that.

You got to rule out, first of all, that your dog may have an illness. Many dogs will eat another dog's poop if the dog is ill. So make sure if your dog is a big poop eater that either the dogs that he's living with or around, aren't ill or sick because that's instinctual. Dog packs, whether it's wild dogs or wolves will many times eat a sick dog's poop to protect the weak, so that other predators won't come and get them. So if your dog is eating another dog's poop or even its own poop, you might want to rule out either a medical condition or a nutritional deficiency.

Here's the other thing that I will tell you is, a lot of times who are the worst poop eaters are high-drive dogs. Dogs that have this the worst are many times high food-drive dogs. So what I recommend to you to do in those cases, if I have a dog that just is a bottomless pit, you might try free feeding. You want to make sure that you're not a breed that typically can get gastric torsion or bloat. But if you put down the food all the time and your dog isn't so hungry all the time, or maybe even some more frequent feedings, this can actually help with a dog that's eating poop because he's just so gosh darn hungry.

Here's the things that we can try doing. First of all, you can try increasing the fiber. Increasing the fiber, things like pumpkin, things like zucchini. These things can really help. If you give that to your dog, it actually makes the poop taste bad. So what I do is I take about a quarter cup for a medium sized dog, medium to a large sized dog. I'll take a quarter cup of zucchini or pumpkin, mix that in with the food, and the taste on the other end isn't very good. So you'll find that your dog really doesn't like the taste of it and that may help a lot.

The other thing that you might try is putting a spice called papain powder. It's P-A-P-A-I-N powder. I put a little bit of that in there, like a teaspoon, and that also has been shown to really deter dogs from eating their own poop. Another thing, but you got to be careful is Brewer's yeast. A small, small quarter of a teaspoon of Brewer's yeast. I've seen Brewer's yeast can sometimes, if you give too much, it actually can cause that gastric torsion or bloat. So a small amount of Brewer's yeast in the diet. I sort of sprinkle the Brewer's yeast on there, and even the papain powder, I might sprinkle it on like sort of salt and pepper, and that really could be quite just enough.

Apple cider vinegar. It has to be organic. And I would put in about a teaspoon into the meal

for every 30 pounds of dog. So if your dog is 60 pounds, put in two teaspoons. Apple cider vinegar in the food, it has to be organic. I don't know why, but that's the only one that seems to work. Years ago we used to think that a lower protein diet works. Well you know what? This actually is now reversed. Now everybody says try the raw diet. All meat and bones, a raw diet, or dehydrated diet, or even a high protein kibble, many times will help the dog not want to eat its own poop. So we used to think it was low protein and now all of that has changed, and now that research is showing that it's high protein.

All right, I'm going to give you a website that I have used and think ... This woman Vernon Lee from dogpoopdiet.com. She's dedicated a whole website just to poop eating. That's how big this problem is. Dog poop, D-O-G-P-O-O-P diet.com. Her name is Vernon Lee. If you register, she even writes you emails and gives you hints all the time. She really has a great website to really help you through with this problem. So I would absolutely try that. Getting ahold of Vernon Lee on her website, and she will give you a little tidbits of information along the way, and I find it very, very helpful.

So what is Pica? P-I-C-A. Pica is when a dog will eat a non-food item such as your socks, your underwear, a piece of shoe, stones, sticks, and they actually digest them and consume them to own them. You see what happens is when a dog is outside and your dog is starting to swallow rocks. We see a lot of this starts to happen with puppies. What people do is they get a new puppy, they go outside and the puppy will pick up a stick. And immediately the paranoid owner is going to go, "Oh my God, my dog has a stick." And they reach down and they tried to pry open the jaws, and then they pull out the stick and the dog is like, "Oh my gosh, you want this object." Problem is with that is, is that you're actually teaching the dog that it's a scarce resource. That the stone, or the stick, or the wood chip, or the sock that they've grabbed is actually something that you want.

So what I recommend doing is, you don't do that. Because if the dog starts to think that you want the object, they're going to start swallowing the object as quickly as they can, so that they get it, and they win. So one of the things you never want to do is when your dog has grabbed the stick and, of course, this happens when people first get their eight or 12 week old puppies. And your dog grabs an object ... First of all, many times it won't matter. Many times the stick is not going to make them choke. Let them, if it's not hurting the dog, let them just have it. Try to redirect them and they'll drop it. You might try grabbing a squeaky ball, or you might call them to you with a treat. Many times the dog will just drop it. But if every time your dog grabs an object, you race over and try to get it out of their mouth, they're going to start developing Pica syndrome.

And I have seen this happen many, many times. And you know what happens when this happens? We get blockage, we bring our dog to the veterinarian and they cut out chunks of their intestines and this becomes a really expensive procedure, and it can be dangerous to your dog. I've seen dogs actually die from Pica syndrome. So what do we do if our dog has this problem? Again, I talked about redirecting. You also want to make sure that when your dog has the object, that you don't come down hard on them and correct them. Again, act nonchalant. Be like, "Oh well, Hey, come on George, let's come. Come over here George." And clap your hands and redirect them and pretty soon they're going to think, "Oh, it's not a big deal."

You can also do things like teach them to leave it. So what I do is when I have a dog that is grabbing objects, I am going to actually teach that dog the Leave It command. I try taking a clicker. I'll get some treats in my pocket, some high quality food treats, something like maybe a hot dog, or the best darn treat my dog likes. And when my dog walks over and he goes to look at something that maybe he's not really looking to pick up, I'm actually going to have the clicker in my hand. I'm going to have some treats in a bait pouch and I'm going to say to my dog, "Leave it." Get his attention. When he turns away from the stone or whatever he's trying to pick up, I'm going to hit that clicker and give him a treat. I'm going to mark him leaving it.

So teaching your dog Leave It would be a really good thing to do for this behavior, if your dog is picking things up. I have a client that I have known for years. I think I'm on her second dog, training her dog, and recently she came to me with this very issue. Her name is Diane and she has a new dog named Jackson and I watched her literally creating her dog to have Pica syndrome. This puppy was picking up everything when she was walking around and she was running around to Jackson, grabbing everything out of her mouth. So I'm going to have my friend Diane call in right now and let's talk to her and see how her progress is going.

Diane: Hello?

Chris: Hi Diane. It's Chris Onthank from Canine Master. How are you?

Diane: Hi.

Chris: I am so happy to have you on my show. And I wanted to talk to you today a little bit about your dog, Jackson. How's Jackson doing?

Diane: He's doing very well. Thank you.

Chris: Yeah, so Diane, I've known you for a long time, I think. How many years has it been, Diane, that we've been working together?

Diane: It's got to be 16 years, because you trained my other dog Hunter 15 years ago.

Chris: Hunter, what a great dog. He was a great dog and he's a Border Terrier. And the new dog-

Diane: Yes, he was a Border Terrier.

Chris: You have, Jackson, he's a Border Terrier as well?

Diane: Yes, he is.

Chris: All right. So I know, let me tell you a little bit. Diane, you have a marine store and your dogs are a big part of your life. So I know that Hunter used to hang out with you at your store all the time, correct?

Diane: Yes, that's right. Every day,

Chris: Every day. And he was such a great dog. Wasn't he?

Diane: Thanks to you. Yes, he was.

Chris: Well thanks for that. Now, you did a lot of good work with Hunter. But Jackson is how old now? He's like 12 weeks old.

Diane: Jackson is about three months, yeah.

Chris: About 12 weeks old. Okay. So recently, I'm just going to describe this for the audience. But recently you came to me with a problem where Jackson was actually picking up everything that he came across off the ground. Is that right?

Diane: Everything. Everything in sight, rocks, paper, you name it.

Chris: All right. So what was your feeling? Were you going crazy on it? Or, what-

Diane: Yeah, I felt a little helpless because he wasn't even focusing on going to the bathroom. He was just focusing on what he could put in his mouth, and how fast.

Chris: Yeah. Really. And you were worried. I mean, you were worried that he was going to choke and have to go to the vet.

Diane: Yeah. And I thought maybe he was going to swallow something that would not come out.

Chris: Did you even call your veterinarian about this? I thought you did, right?

Diane: No, I don't think I did. I think I spoke to you, or called you. I don't think I called the vet.

Chris: Okay. All right. Yeah, so what happened was, is that Jackson was grabbing everything and what were you doing, Diane that was aggravating the problem? We talked about it.

Diane: Oh, I was taking everything out of his mouth. Everything. Every time I saw something, I was like grabbed it real quick out of his mouth, which I think was probably the worst thing.

Chris: So quickly, what Diane and ... When I worked with Diane, as I said, "Diane ..." just what I was just describing "... we're going to redirect him." What were you finding was the best way to redirect him Diane?

Diane: Like you said, to let him eat the stuff. Let him eat-

Chris: But you also were actually clapping your hands, or "Come on Jackson, let's go."

Diane: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

Chris: So he was starting not to eat everything. And you redirected him, and he started ... Now is he doing better now, Diane? Or how are we doing now? How are we progressing?

Diane: He's doing much better. Oh my God, it really is amazing. I'm not even really thinking about that much anymore at all. Much better.

Chris: Well, it really is amazing. We actually can create our own problems when it comes to dog training. Many of the behavioral problems that I see, if we just let the dogs be by themselves, we find that we don't have these problems. I mean, how many dogs on the streets in India, or Thailand, or street dogs, or coyotes are picking up sticks and having things ripped out of their mouths? They really don't develop Pica syndrome. It's not even an issue for a wild dog. But certainly we get involved, and we want to just get everything taken out of the dog's mouth because we're so worried about our dogs, and making sure that they're healthy, and making sure not to eat the wrong thing, that we actually create our own problems over, and over, and over again. I kind of think of that's what was happening with you, Diane.

Diane: Yes, I do believe it. And you know, even when I stopped people that saw me, saw him eating stuff were trying to take it out of his mouth. I said, "No, that's okay."

Chris: Yeah, yeah. Of course, we always do want to, if you see something dangerous, something sharp, we do want to remove that from his mouth. But then very quickly what I would do is just distract him and get the dog just moving in another direction. Well, I tell you, Diane, I'm so happy to hear it. And how is his training going, Diane? How are we doing with his training?

Diane: Oh, very well, thank you. With your guidance, he's already knows how to sit, and lay down, and come, everything. Amazing.

Chris: That's great. And is he walking nicely on the leash now?

Diane: Yes, he is. Behind me.

Chris: Well that's great Diane. That's awesome. Well, I'm happy to hear that Diane. And listen, thanks for calling in today. And I look forward to talking to you and seeing you at our next lesson, but I really appreciate it.

Diane: Thank you Chris.

Chris: All right, well you take care Diane.

Diane: You too. Bye.

Chris: Bye.

All right, well that was great to talk to Diane and I will tell you, her dog Jackson is really, really a smart little Border Terrier and much like her last dog. This woman is so dedicated to

her dog, and really the dog is really a huge part of her life at work. And we see that we really are trying to do the right thing for our dogs, but many times we actually create the problems that we're trying to fix later on.

So I have Jaimee here, and Jaimee, I think we have a couple of questions from our listeners.

Jaimee: We do. Our first question is from Mary from Ohio. She says, "We have a six month old Dachshund who loves her own poop. I've tried everything, and now she's even eating other dog's poop at the park, it's driving us crazy. It's so disgusting. How can I correct her when I see her eating the poop?"

Chris: Well, what I would do is I wouldn't actually correct her, because sometimes again, that makes the dog think that you want the poop. I actually would just redirect her. If we correct a dog hard for when it has an object, many times it actually makes the dog want to own it even more. You've seen resource guarding, and a lot of times, and we'll talk about this in a future program, but resource guarding comes from when you over-correct a dog when it has the object. We really don't ever want to do that. We want to actually reward the dog for giving up the object.

So that goes for pooping as well. If my dog is eating poop, I might squeak a squeak ball, if he likes a ball. Or grab a treat, call them over to us and try to get them just to realize that that's not important, that better things are over in this corner, or on this side of the yard. And that many times will help with those issues.

Jaimee: Okay. Our next question is from Jennifer in Boston. "We just got a Lab puppy and she puts everything in her mouth. While I know that's normal, I'm not sure what's safe for her to chew on, especially outside. She loves sticks and leaves. Is that okay?"

Chris: Well, you know, it is. Sticks and leaves are natural objects outside, and dogs will eat grass as well. One of the things is if I find that my dog is eating a lot of sticks and leaves, one of the things that I have found helpful is actually to add more fiber. You can do this by adding a spoonful of Metamucil. Metamucil is, we use for regularity. It adds fiber to the intestines, and water, and helps things pass. So if you find that your dog is actually eating a lot of sticks and leaves, you might try putting a spoonful of Metamucil in with some water in the food, and that's going to actually help the items pass. I find that ... That's an old secret that my grandmother gave me years ago.

Jaimee: Okay. Our last question is from Tom from Texas. He writes, "I have a two year old Golden Retriever mix, who every time I walk through the door grabs an object, like a stuffed animal, or a sock and brings it to me to show it to me. I think it's adorable, but I wonder if there isn't something more to this behavior and would love your input."

Chris: Well, this is interesting Tom. You know, many dogs will grab an object upon greeting. They also, many dogs upon greeting, will go to their owners and put their mouth on their arm or their hands. This is not aggression. This is actually the act of where the dog is kind of claiming you. A mother will do this to her puppies. Puppies come back to the whelping box and the mother will put their mouth around the dog's head or muzzle. This is very common.

It is actually to claim ownership, is what I have seen. And it's interesting, a dog that grabs an object and brings it to you upon greeting, is a dog that really is maybe realigning this behavior. Meaning your dog may be, instead of grabbing your arm, is grabbing an object and doing that instead. Because maybe you've corrected them for putting their mouth on you.

So I wouldn't really be concerned if your dog is grabbing an object when you come home and greeting you. I used to have a dog that did the exact same thing. One of my Dobermans years ago. Every time I came home she would quickly pick up one of my shoes and bring it to me. Very normal. I see this all the time and usually it's a dog that is very much dedicated, and loving, and also just is really excited to see you, and redirects the behavior of trying to own you and grabs the object instead.

Jaimee, why don't you tell us how people can ask questions to me, and I can help them with their dogs.

Jaimee: Okay, great. Well now all of you can have access to all of Chris's knowledge about pets. All you have to do is go to our website, caninemaster.com and you can click on Ask the Canine Master. You can even upload your photos or videos so we can see exactly what's going on. But also, you can follow us on Twitter @caninemaster and if you use the #askcaninemaster we'll be able to see all of your questions, and hopefully get back to everybody, and maybe even have you on the show. #askcaninemaster A-S-K-C-A-N-I-N-E-M-A-S-T-E-R.

Chris: All right. Well, that's it for today. Please make sure to visit us on caninemaster.com. That's C-A-N-I-N-E master.com. Click on Ask the Canine Master and leave your questions for me. And I'll do my best to get back to you, and I may even have you call into the show with your questions. So send me your videos and photos so I can see what's going with your dog and I can try to help you master the solution with your dog.

Goodbye for now. See you next time on Canine Master Radio where I will help you to continue to master the relationship with your dog.