

The Forbidden Snack: Why Your Dog Thinks Poop is a Delicacy

By Gemini & M. Zupan

It is a stomach-turning habit for humans, but in the animal kingdom, eating feces—scientifically known as **coprophagia**—is actually quite common. While it's rarely a sign of a major medical crisis, there are several biological and behavioral reasons why dogs indulge in this "delicacy."



Why Dogs Eat Poop: The Instinctual Drive

For most dogs, this behavior is more about ancient instincts or environmental factors than a simple lack of manners.

- **Evolutionary Instinct:** In the wild, mothers eat the stool of their puppies to keep the "den" clean and hide the scent from predators. Puppies often mimic this, though most outgrow it.
- **The "Clean-Up" Instinct:** Some dogs are simply fastidious. If they see waste in their space, they may take it upon themselves to "remove" it.
- **Anxiety or Boredom:** Dogs left alone for long periods may eat stool to pass the time. Additionally, if a dog has been harshly punished for accidents, they may "eat the evidence" to avoid getting in trouble.

The Missing Links: Is it a Nutritional Cry for Help?

Many experts believe this is an instinctual attempt to solve a nutritional shortfall. If your dog has picked up this habit, they might be missing:

1. **Vitamin B (Thiamine and B12):** If a diet is heavily processed, a dog may instinctively "recycle" waste to ingest the B-vitamins synthesized by gut bacteria.
2. **Digestive Enzymes:** Modern diets are high in carbohydrates. If a dog doesn't produce enough enzymes to break them down, they seek out the undigested nutrients and microbes found in stool to help "repopulate" their gut.

3. **Trace Minerals:** If the soil used for food ingredients is depleted of minerals, your dog may seek a balance through waste.
4. **Calories and Malabsorption:** Low-quality "fillers" or conditions like **EPI** and parasites can prevent nutrient absorption, leaving a dog feeling chronically starved.

Note: Medical conditions like diabetes, thyroid disease, or Cushing's syndrome can also drastically increase appetite, making a dog seek out anything edible.

Why Cat Poop is "Dog Caviar"

If a dog eats their own poop out of habit, they often view the litter box as a high-value snack bar.

- **Protein and Fat:** Cats are obligate carnivores. Their stool often smells (to a dog) exactly like the high-protein salmon or chicken dinner the cat just ate.
- **The Smell Factor:** A dog's sense of smell is up to 100,000 times more acute than ours. While we smell waste, they smell undigested nutrients.
- **Novelty:** Sometimes, the "crunch" of kitty litter is simply a novel, albeit gross, sensory experience.



Is It Dangerous?

While generally just a "gross" habit, there are genuine risks:

- **Parasites:** Stool can carry roundworms, hookworms, or Giardia.
 - **Litter Ingestion:** Clumping litter can potentially cause intestinal blockages.
 - **Bacteria:** Salmonella can be passed from the waste to the dog, and then to you via those "dog kisses."
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The Solution: The "Scoop-and-Dash"

The most effective way to break the habit is to remove the temptation. Keep the yard clear and place the litter box in a spot—or inside furniture—where the dog cannot reach it. If the behavior persists, consult your vet to rule out parasites or discuss adding a digestive enzyme supplement to their meals.