

## **Why Does My Dog Eat Cat Poop?**

Does this sound like you? “I feed Gigi very well. She gets two squares a day and I even add my baked chicken and rice to her already nutritious kibble and she *still* eats our cat’s poop!” “No matter what I do, Winston just knows when Ezra has done her business in the litter box and makes a bee line for it!” Much as this is going to disgust you to hear it, this is not only normal – yuck! – it’s also a universal complaint of nearly every single dog owner. So universal, there is a name for it: coprophagia. Coprophagia is defined as the deliberate ingestion of fecal matter. Consider Winston and Gigi in great company. Some 80% of dog owners at one point or another find their dogs returning from the litter box smacking their lips.

### **Why Do Dogs Engage in Such a Disgusting Ritual?**

There are actually several theories behind this question. Theories of course suggest that animal behaviorists are split on why canines love feline feces. One theory suggests that dogs are supplementing their diet with something – mainly protein - they are deficient in, which evidently exists in Ezra’s excrement. Indeed it is true that a cat’s diet consists of much higher levels of protein than does a dog’s; you need only read the ingredients in their respective kibble bags to confirm this. However, with many dog owners supplementing their pups’ dry food with extra chicken, beef or lamb (whether raw or cooked), suggests this theory is lacking some validity – or perhaps it’s outdated.

Another theory lies in the “Monkey see, monkey do” adage. Winston sees you cleaning out Ezra’s litter box and carting the goodies off to either your toilet, garbage or in baggie. Winston, the oh so practical, helpful and obedient observer that you have raised him to be, figures he’ll cut out the middle man – the toilet or the baggie – and give mom or dad a little helping paw. “I’ll take care of that for you!” Mouth wide open, tail wagging and lips are smacking! In this author’s eyes, this might seem the plausible.

One other even less plausible theory suggests that both Winston and Gigi are begging you for attention. Not sure about you, but if you have ever observed your dog’s urge to vacuum up the “goodies,” this isn’t around your dog’s schedule but rather when Ezra does her business – which is usually not on a timer. Whether it’s during dinner, at 3:00 in the morning or just after a long hike you’ve just been on with your dog, the moment their feline sister or brother does the business, it’s as though there’s a bell ringing and off they go to the litter box. Often they’ll return, not only with the evidence still clearly caked in their teeth, but oh so happy to give you a big doggy kiss, tongue and all. Does this sound like an-attention seeking dog?

### **If It’s Normal, Does that Mean It’s Okay?**

Unfortunately, for all its normalcy, it’s not healthy – that is physically. Unfortunately, there are a few thousand reasons you should do your best to persuade Gigi from eating cat poop. Cats, although slightly more discriminating eaters than dogs – after all they are too dignified to eat another animal’s poop – can have parasites. Some are visible,

like those white ones you may see from time to time, those are whipworms. Sometimes they aren't always because the colors might blend with the feces making them difficult to detect. Gigi eats up the goodies and bang! She too has parasites, which means a costly trip to the vet for a 3-day dose of antiparasite medicine.

### **Now That You Know That Your Dog is Normal, How Do You Get Him or Her to Stop?**

This might be a much easier said than done. As with anything when you are training your dog, there is the 3-second rule. You have literally three seconds to catch Winston in the act if your admonishment is going to be effective. First of all, remembering that he very well might be mimicking your behavior, chastising him and then returning to clean it out another day or hour later will only confuse him. What you could do is the following:

- As soon as you see Ezra on her way to the litter box, waiting around the corner, because you know she's got shy about pooping in public, wait till she's done and for the one-dog parade to follow in behind her. Before he even gets his jaws clamped on the goody, say loudly, "No, Winston! Leave it!" Of course this will take a few times before it sinks in. This habit didn't start overnight, and it surely will take some repetition to break it.
- When you go into whatever room you keep Ezra's litter in, don't allow Gigi or Winston to follow and watch you scoop it. Keep a little trash bin next to the litter box and dispose of the "yummy treats" and remove them at another time, after his or her mind is no longer fixated on them.
- Another solution, although this will require both time and a financial investment on your part is to create a hole in the wall or door and install a cat door for Ezra – large enough for her, too small for her canine sister or brother.

Breaking your dog of this habit won't be easy, but with a little patience and perseverance, you can stop him or her from feasting on your cat's feces.