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Pica.

"Pica" is a medical issue referring to a dog's craving of a non-food item and the subsequent eating of said item.

Coprophagia on the other hand is the eating and ingesting of feces.

{See article about Coprophagia on this website.}

Generally, neither of these conditions are the result of an underlying disease, however, it can and do occur and can affect both dogs and cats.

Fortunately, there are treatment options in these types of cases, or behavior modification practices that can be implemented if it is a non-medical issue.

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Symptoms and types.

You may observe the dog eating dirt, clay, rocks, soap, or other items that can AND ALSO WILL endanger the dog's health.

The largest organ system that is affected by this behavior is the *gastrointestinal* tract, especially if foreign objects are being swallowed. You may notice that the dog is vomiting, has loose stools, or has diarrhea. There may be weakness and *lethargy* in the dog.

Causes.

There are several possible causes of dogs eating feces or other non-food items, including *malnutrition*, vitamin deficiency, increased appetite, or conditions such as diabetes, or thyroid disease.

Parasites can be another of the causes for this behavior.

It stands to reason that a dog will sometimes eat their feces if there are undigested articles of food in their stool.

Mothers with newborns will also commonly eat the feces of their newborns. As such, puppies may eat feces as an observation of the mother's behavior or as part of exploration. In addition, a dog may eat feces as a response to recent punishment, to get attention or because it desires to clean its environmental area.

Medical causes:

Inflammatory bowel disease

Diabetes.

Intestinal parasites

Anemia.

Increased hunger

Neurological disease

Vitamin deficiency

Malnutrition

Thyroid disease

Diagnosis.

Your veterinarian will be looking to distinguish between medical and behavioral causes. A full physical examination will be recommended to rule out underlying medical causes. If it is not due to a medical condition, the veterinarian will conduct a full history on the dog, including its diet and appetite, handling practices, and information about its environment. This will assist the veterinarian in developing a proper treatment plan.

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