

The Scoop on Poop

Mary Pat Parkhill, with contributions by Ellen McCracken and from Medical Facts by Dr. Peter Betz

It was a beautiful afternoon for a tea with my friends. They brought over their greyhounds to play with my two in my large yard. We sat on the deck with homemade butter cookies and watched the dogs romp. I looked over at Yvonne and asked, "So what do you think? Is an orange color something I should be worried about?" Kay chirped in, "But you are feeding them pumpkin and sweet potatoes, aren't you?"

After taking a dainty bite of cookie and sip of tea, Yvonne spoke up and asked, "But still should it be THAT orange?"

Excrement, or the less technical terms of poop, stool, turds, BMs and the ever-popular poopsicle found in winter, is a common topic for dog owners. It can be an emotional issue because of our cultural embarrassment with the subject. But it is a strong indication of the health of your greyhound. According to Dr. Peter Betz of the Hillsboro Vet Group in Hillsboro, New Jersey, there are three specifics that you need to watch: form, color and content. Some changes mean nothing. Other indicators should have you calling the vet's office immediately.

Form

Posters on one Internet greyhound bulletin board display a descriptive "potato scale" for poop form, ranging from potato soup to mashed potatoes, Tater Tots, or Idaho Bakers. The most common cause for concern is "the Big D," or diarrhea: a very popular topic because it is so common in dogs.

Runny stool can be caused by many things – disease, parasites, excitement, running like crazy when normally quiet, new food or riding in the back of a truck on a cold day. If your dog is bright and alert, showing no other symptoms, there is no need to rush off to the vet's. Simply start a bland diet of white rice with boiled chicken or chopped beef. Use one part meat to two parts rice. Let the dog go four to six hours without food; then start off with very small portions, about the size of a Swedish meatball. Feed in half-hour increments. Have the food warmed to body temperature. Cold food is added stress on an already upset stomach. Keep it small, simple and frequent.

Remember that after your greyhound has had a bout with diarrhea, his or her bowels are empty. So do not expect output too soon. Many people swear by pumpkin, but because it contains fiber, there can be a corresponding increase in room-clearing greyhound gas. You will also want to stay away from sugar and preservatives, as they tend to cause more diarrhea and upset.

Chew toys, eating grass or eating stool can perpetuate diarrhea. What you do need to watch for is black, tarry stool indicating blood in the small intestines. Prolonged diarrhea can lead to dehydration. Check your greyhound's gums for "refill" time. Press your thumb against the gum; it should return to pink in 1.5 seconds. Longer than 2.5 seconds means dehydration. A vet visit is in order for black, tarry stool; prolonged diarrhea when diarrhea is accompanied by other symptoms such as lethargy, vomiting or depression. It

can take three or four days before you can expect formed stool to return.

A few miscellaneous basics on form: if your greyhound shows signs of constipation, or if stool is so formed it “bounces,” Metamucil is recommended. When trying out different foods, give your dog at least 90 days before you switch again. A myth is that the more formed the stool is, the better for the anal gland. There is no relation between a clogged anal gland and soft stool. A muscle does the expressing and firming up the stool will not help. If food allergies are suspect, a simple blood test is all that is needed. It’s better to spend the money on a blood test than to play around with different foods month after month. It is a most definite improvement over prolonging the odorous atmospheric conditions or performing a mutt-mitt ballet on underformed output.

Color

Color does not hold as much diagnostic information as form or content. Color can change from day to day. If you see bright red in the stool and you aren’t missing any red crayons, that is “frank” blood and indicates large bowel upset. If you see it occasionally, there is no immediate cause for worry. New food, Nylabones or constipation could be the cause. If it is persistent, however, see your vet.

Content

Content poses perhaps the most fascinating poop topic. Late one night I was outside with flashlight in hand when my neighbor called over, “Is everything alright?” I nonchalantly answered, “Yes, I am just looking for Brindle’s poop.”

Since I foster many greyhounds coming off the track, I have to be constant lookout for worms. Cleaning the yard at 10:30 p.m. does not really fit my schedule, especially if my foot find the treasure before the flashlight does. However, a regular cleanup does keep the worm problem down. Two varieties of worms are easily seen with naked eye: tapeworms, which resemble rice, and roundworms, which look like long spaghetti strands. Dronsit or Cestex will take care of the tapeworms, while Panacur will handle the other worms. Microscopic examination will be needed for whipworms, hookworms and roundworms. Strongid will work on hookworms and roundworms but not whipworms. Other parasites that will need a microscopic evaluation are Giardia and Coccidia. Most of these organisms do not pose a big threat, but should still be addressed.

Another reason to get up close and personal with content is to look for undigested food or foreign objects. You will need to contact the vet in these two incidences in case of disease or damage. Dogs will attempt anything in their quest for the edible, ranging from television remotes to pantyhose.

I had a gaggle of greyhounds visit one day for a playdate. One owner said she suspected her ate the stuffing from a damaged toy, but she wasn’t sure. Later that day, after cleaning up the yard, I was able to definitely tell her yes, her little girl did indeed eat the stuffing, as I had just scooped up the evidence.

Collection

A clean, dry, waterproof container with a tight-fitting lid is recommended. I like to use an old medicine container that many have held antibiotics previously prescribed for my greyhound, cleaned and dried. Tongue depressors or wooden Popsicle sticks are

excellent tools for transferring the poop from where it landed to inside the container. Gloves, clothespins, protective goggles and body suit are optional.

In short, use common sense, develop an understanding of what is normal for your dog and practice moderation.