

The Many Poses Dogs Strike to Relieve Themselves

Is it true that all male dogs lift a leg and all females squat to urinate? If you've spent much time around different dogs, you know there are many more variations - or 'signature' ways of peeing. What's the meaning behind each pee position, and why do dogs kick at the ground after pooping?

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- According to conventional wisdom, dogs urinate in one of two positions — with leg lifted (males), or squatting (females); the truth is, there are at least a dozen dog peeing positions according to one study
- The study authors learned, after observing a group of laboratory Beagles, that female dogs exhibit a much broader repertoire of pee positions than their male counterparts
- Since urinating serves a dual purpose for both male and female dogs — elimination and scent marking — pee positions are often dictated by variables such as a dog's age, gender, reproductive status, and proximity to home
- When dogs kick at the ground after pooping, it's also for the purpose of scent marking

If you've spent any time around different dogs, you know that many have their own "signature" way of peeing. The notion that all male dogs raise a leg to do their business, and all females squat is an oversimplification that believe it or not, has been disproven by actual studies of the poses dogs strike to relieve themselves.

One Dozen Dog Peeing Positions

In 1973, a pair of researchers observed a group of 60 male and 53 female laboratory Beagles, all of them intact, and identified 12 positions they assumed while urinating:¹

- **Stand** — Standing normally
- **Handstand** — Both hind feet are lifted off the ground; they may be unsupported or placed against a vertical surface
- **Lean-Raise** — A combination of the Lean and Raise postures
- **Lean** — The body is leaning forward, and the hind legs are extended to the back
- **Arch** — The hind legs are usually spread and bent to bring the hind end close to the ground; the back is rounded, and the tail is lifted away from the ground
- **Flex-Raise** — A combination of the Flex and Raise postures
- **Flex** — The hind legs are partially flexed so the rear end is slightly lowered; the hind feet usually remain under the body (no straddle)

- **Raise** — One hind leg is bent and raised off the ground, but the leg is kept relatively low
- **Squat-Raise** — A combination of the Squat and Raise postures
- **Squat** — The hind legs are straddled and sharply bent to bring the hind end close to the ground; the back is straight
- **Elevate** — One hind leg is bent and raised off the ground; the foot and leg are held high
- **Arch-Raise** — A combination of the Arch and Raise postures

Pee Positions by Gender

The researchers observed that the female Beagles squatted most of the time, but several also frequently did the squat-raise. They also used most of the other positions, but on a limited basis.

Interestingly, the male Beagles weren't nearly as pee-dexterous as the females. All of them assumed the elevate posture and some did the raise. There was the rare squat-raise or lean-raise, but beyond that, they were never observed assuming any of the remaining eight positions.

The Meaning Behind Pee Positions

It's important to note that urination serves two purposes for dogs — relieving themselves and marking. Both males and females scent mark, but males do it much more often.

Typically, dogs pick vertical surfaces to mark, and if they shoot high, the urine will flow downward, covering more surface and sending a stronger message to the next dog who drops by. Peeing high up also has the effect of making the dog seem bigger than he actually is, which is probably why males and especially small breed males are so fond of the elevate posture.

Interestingly, female dogs may use the handstand posture to urinate at least as high or even higher than a similarly sized male. A 2004 study looked at the peeing behaviors of six spayed and six intact female Jack Russell Terriers during walks close to home, and further away from their homes.²

Take-home message No. 1: When a dog of either sex takes a posture that results in peeing on objects above the ground's surface, there's a good chance he or she is doing it to leave a "high-value" scent mark.

Take-home message No. 2: A variety of peeing positions are perfectly normal for both male and female dogs, and which ones they use depends on several factors, including their age, gender, and possibly their reproductive status. If your dog typically pees in one or two different positions and suddenly switches to another posture altogether, it could be a sign of pain or some other medical problem and requires attention.

Why Dogs Kick the Ground After Pooping

Moving on from number 1 to number 2, picture this: You walk your dog Barkley to his usual potty spot, and after much sniffing and peeing and more sniffing, he poops. You're standing ready with biodegradable poop bag in hand, and as you bend over to collect his deposit, grass and soil pelts your face because little Barkley, having done his business, is now kicking the ground furiously with his back legs. Weird.

Here's the simple explanation for your dog's post-poop happy dance: Wild canines kick the ground after defecating to tidy up (much as cats do in their litterbox), and, once again, to mark territory. Your dog has glands in his feet that secrete pheromones, and a couple of backward scrapes of the paws releases those chemicals, thus "claiming" the spot.

That's why dogs spend so much time sniffing the ground, bushes, tree trunks, and anywhere another animal may have eliminated. They're constantly monitoring their territory and sniffing out information about other dogs who have come and gone.

There's nothing you need to do to "correct" this perfectly natural canine behavior. Just expect it and accept it!

Sources and References

[PetMD, January 18, 2018](#)

¹ [Anisko, J.J. and Sprague, R.H. Elimination Patterns in the Laboratory Beagle, Behaviour, January 1, 1973](#)

² [Wirant, S.C. and McGuire, B. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, Volume 85, Issues 3-4, 25 March 2004, Pages 335-348](#)
