

## Does Your Dog Do Any of These 10 Perplexing Things?

She does some of them just because her genes tell her to - including this strange magnetic alignment when they relieve themselves. Many can have you shaking your head. But, one can be a sign of boredom and another can indicate a serious medical problem.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dogs are less mysterious than cats, but they do have a few behaviors that leave us humans scratching our heads
- Some of these behaviors involve pooping, others involve peeing, and still others involve sleeping
- Dog-to-dog communication is also a source of curiosity for most dog guardians

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Our canine companions often seem to sense our moods and understand our words. They live in close association with us as valued members of our family.

But unlike a human best friend or close family confidante, our dog pals do some decidedly un-human things that leave us scratching our heads and reminding us that they are, after all, a different species.

### 10 Things Dogs Do That (Most) Humans Don't

10. **Facing the same direction every time they poop** — According to a 2013 study, when our canine companions relieve themselves outdoors, they tend to follow a north-south magnetic axis if the Earth's magnetic field is stable at the time nature calls.<sup>1</sup> The researchers found that dogs align themselves north-to-south somewhat more often when they defecate than urinate.

The study authors noted no difference in magnetic sensitivity among different breeds of dogs, which during the course of their study included pooches as small as a Yorkshire Terrier and as large as a Saint Bernard.

9. **Raising their leg to urinate** — One reason male dogs raise a leg to urinate is because urine marks territory, and dogs appear taller and more dominant (to one another) when they make a vertical line with their pee.

In addition, dogs of both genders use pee as a communication tool to assert social status, find potential mates, size up unfamiliar dogs, and limit potentially threatening close contact during social introductions.

Dogs may use urine investigation and scent marking in an attempt to establish safe social connections with other dogs. They might also be evaluating the health, stress, virility, and diet of other dogs just by sniffing their urine.

8. **Kicking the grass** — Some dogs kick the grass after relieving themselves (more often after pooping) to cover their deposit. Others are releasing pheromones from their paws to mark their territory.

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

7. **Sleeping on their backs** — Just like us, dogs want to be comfortable when they sleep, and sometimes that means lying on their backs. Since dogs in the wild would never assume a belly-up position out in the open, rest assured that when your dog rolls onto his back to snooze, he feels comfortable being vulnerable in your presence.

Many dogs roll onto their backs when they're feeling playful, and I also suspect some find it interesting to view the world upside down now and then!

6. **Sticking their heads out car windows** — Some dogs really love to ride in the car with their head out the window. No one really knows why this is, but I suspect they enjoy the feel of the wind on their face. I'm sure they're also enthralled with all the amazing smells they smell as the world zooms by.

Unfortunately, allowing your dog to stick her head out the car window is risky. More than a few dogs have fallen out of moving vehicles this way, which can be catastrophic. There's also the danger that flying debris will land in an eye, up a nostril, in an ear, or in your dog's mouth.

5. **Sniffing the behinds of other dogs** — Dogs communicate with one another through the chemical compounds in their bodies. Butt scents provide a wealth of biochemical information that dogs use to communicate with one another, which is why they always greet each other with a little mutual bottom sniffing.

There are many things about dogs I feel humans should learn to emulate. This isn't one of them!

4. **Circling before lying down** — I'm sure you've watched your own or another dog walk in a tight little circle, head down, and eyes focused downward on his bed or sleep spot. Around and around he goes, until he finally plops down for a snooze.

The circling thing is something your dog's wild cousins do to pack down grass, brush, and whatever else is in their way so they can make a comfortable spot to sleep in. The behavior has not been extinguished in domesticated dogs.

3. **Tail chasing** — This can be a sign of a bored dog or one with obsessive-compulsive tendencies, a problem with anal glands or flea allergy dermatitis, or perhaps a genetic predisposition.

A 2012 study of 368 dogs with tail chasing behavior suggested there is a genetic component involved that requires further investigation. According to study authors:

*"Although the definitive mode of inheritance is often difficult to estimate from pedigrees due to missing phenotypes, our pedigrees in all breeds suggest a strong genetic influence with multiple affected dogs across generations and even within several litters."<sup>2</sup>*

If your dog seems obsessed with chasing her tail or you suspect there could be a medical problem, it's time to make an appointment with your veterinarian.

2. **Head tilting/cocking** — If this happens only when you speak to your dog, especially in a tone of voice that makes him suspect something good is about to happen, chances are his unbearably adorable head tilt is a

show of genuine interest in what you're saying... and what comes next.

Canine behaviorists suspect the head tilt is your dog's attempt to make sense of what you're saying to him. He might be listening intently for a word cue like "treat," "walk," or "play."

If your dog suddenly starts tilting his head for no apparent reason, you should make an appointment with your veterinarian. Random head tilting can be a sign of a serious medical problem.

1. **Chomping on grass** — Some dogs just like the taste of grass and will sample it occasionally. Some dogs nibble only certain grasses, presumably to meet enzyme or trace nutrient needs. And some dogs eat grass because they're trying to sooth their GI tract (which is why they often vomit or poop after grazing on grass for a few minutes).

Unfortunately, grass isn't terribly nutritious and is often loaded with fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, animal waste, potential parasites, and other contaminants. So if your dog likes or needs to eat grass now and then, you might try growing your own **sunflower sprouts** to offer her instead. Sprouts can provide a very easy and inexpensive source of fresh, live organic vegetation for your dog or cat to nibble on.

## Sources and References

[VetStreet April 11, 2014](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Frontiers in Zoology 2013, Vol. 10](#)

<sup>2</sup> [PLoS One Research Article: Environmental Effects on Compulsive Tail Chasing in Dogs, July 26, 2012](#)

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