

Are You Missing These Warning Signs in Your Pet's Stool?

It may not be pretty to look at, but your pet's poop contains signs that will help you know if something's not quite right with your pet's health, so you can prevent it from becoming a bigger problem.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Chocolate-brown, firm, log-shaped stools for dogs and dark brown, easy-to-scoop stools for cats are the gold standard, with frequency matching their diet and age
- Green, yellow, black, red streaks, or pale and greasy stools could point to anything from mild digestive upset to serious conditions like liver problems or internal bleeding
- Loose, pudding-like stools, dry pellets, or sticky residue all indicate stress, diet issues, dehydration, or more significant health concerns that may need veterinary attention
- The right mix of water, fiber, and a stable daily routine helps maintain your pet's gut health and prevent sudden changes in their stool
- Probiotics, natural remedies, and regular observation help keep your pet's digestive system in check, and early detection of changes can save you and your pet from bigger health scares

Let's face it — talking about poop isn't anyone's favorite topic. But if you're a pet parent, keeping an eye on what comes out of them is just as important as what goes inside their body. Your pet's poop can give you clear clues about their overall health, their diet, and even how they're feeling. They may not tell you directly how they're feeling, but their stool can talk for them.

When you know what's normal for your pet — from color and texture to frequency and smell — you'll be able to notice when something is off quickly, which will help you take action early. This article will help you understand what exactly to look for, how to identify normal poop, and when it's time to visit your vet.

The Basics — What's Considered 'Normal' Poop for Dogs and Cats?

Before you can spot a problem, you need to know what healthy poop looks like. According to veterinarian Dr. Chris Bessent, for dogs, a "perfect" poop is chocolate-brown, shaped like a log, and firm but still a little moist. It should hold together when you pick it up, but not be too hard or too soft.¹

Cats have their version of the gold standard — dark brown, tootsie-roll-shaped,² and easy to scoop out of the litter box without leaving too much behind. While this might vary slightly depending on diet, sticking close to this picture means your pet's digestion is on track. As for the smell, it should be mild and not extremely foul. Cat stool that smells very bad can be a sign of intestinal parasites or bleeding in the gastrointestinal tract.³

Frequency is just as important as appearance. Ideally, the amount of poop should make sense for how much your pet is eating. If your pet has a big appetite, it makes sense for them to have larger or more frequent stools. Eating smaller amounts of food leads to smaller, less frequent poop.

Most adult dogs should poop one to three times a day. Puppies are little poop machines, and can go up to five times a day.⁴ Cats typically poop once or twice daily, though this can change as they age. Some older cats might go less often.⁵

It's also helpful to pay attention to how quickly your pet needs to go; it's also one of the easiest ways to spot a health issue before other symptoms appear. Dogs with healthy digestion will usually do their business regularly and without urgency. Cats, on the other hand, tend to stick to their litter box habits. If they're suddenly skipping or going too often, it could mean trouble.

For example, you have a dog who poops regularly, twice a day. Suddenly, he starts going four or five times a day, and the stool's consistency looks strange than his usual poop — this can be a sign that something's wrong.

What Your Pet's Stool Color Means

Color changes in your pet's poop are like flashing warning signs that something might be off. While brown is ideal for dogs and cats, you might sometimes see other shades. Here are a few examples:^{6,7}

- **Green stool** — Could mean your pet has been eating grass, possibly to soothe an upset stomach. However, if you haven't seen your pet doing this (such as if they do not go outdoors or have no access to a grassy lawn), it could point to a problem with their gallbladder or bile flow. If the green poop continues for more than a day or two, consult with your vet.
- **Yellow or orange stool** — Certain foods can cause this, but it might also signal a liver or pancreas issue. If the color has an unusual acidic smell or your pet seems uncomfortable, don't wait too long before bringing them to the vet.
- **Black, tarry poop** — This is especially concerning, as it's usually a sign that there's bleeding somewhere high in the digestive tract, like the stomach or small intestine — this is a situation where you should call your vet immediately.
- **Red streaks in the poop** — Seeing this can mean there's bleeding in the lower digestive system. It could be as simple as straining from constipation or something more serious like colitis, colon ulcers, or hemorrhoids.
- **Small white specks (similar to rice grain)** — This is a sign that your pet has parasites, either tapeworms or roundworms.
- **Pale, grey, or greasy-looking poop** — This is a sign that there's something wrong with your pet's liver or pancreas.

Observe Their Stool's Texture as Well

Dr. Bessent recommends using the sliding scale for stool to assess your pet's health based on stool texture. Ideally, your pet's stool should be around Type 3 or 4 — it should be firm, formed, but still moist.⁸

If the texture is too soft, almost like pudding, your pet might be dealing with stress, parasites, or a change in diet that their body doesn't like. Loose stool might clear up on its own, especially when you add fiber-rich foods to their diet. However, if it continues for more than two days, schedule a visit with your vet.

Stool that falls under Type 1 or 2 means your pet is constipated. If the poop is dry, hard, and comes out in little pellets, your pet might not be drinking enough water or might need more fiber. Constipation can make your pet feel sluggish and uncomfortable, leading to bigger problems if it continues. Cats are especially prone to this as they age,⁹ and it can sometimes indicate issues like kidney disease.

How to Keep Your Pet's Gut (and Poop) Healthy

A healthy gut leads to healthy poop, and that starts with the proper diet. Ensure your pet is getting food rich in nutrients and balanced for their age, breed, and activity level. Too much or too little fiber can throw things off balance. Adding small amounts of pumpkin or psyllium husk can help firm things up for pets prone to loose stools.

Water is just as important as food. If your pet isn't drinking enough, their poop becomes hard and dry, leading to constipation. On the other hand, drinking too much water could indicate an underlying issue. Keep an eye on their water bowl and note any sudden changes in how much they're drinking. Remember to keep their food and water bowls clean at all times as well.

Pets are creatures of habit, so sudden changes in routine can lead to stress, which can affect their stomach. Try to keep feeding times, walks, and playtimes consistent. If you're traveling or changing their routine, know that a temporary change in stool consistency is normal, but things should return to normal when they're back in their comfort zone.

Adding probiotics and prebiotics to your pet's diet can support a healthy gut. These help keep the good bacteria in your pet's digestive system thriving, which in turn helps with digestion, nutrient absorption, and even mood. Natural remedies like slippery elm can also soothe mild digestive upsets. If you're unsure what's right for your pet, your vet can help guide you.

Sources and References

^{1,6,8} [HerbSmith, July 12, 2021](#)

² [Red Hills Animal Hospital, Get the Scoop: What Your Pet's Poop is Telling You](#)

^{3,5,9} [Purina, February 26, 2025](#)

^{4,7} [MedVet, October 9, 2023](#)
