

The Scoop on Poop

Warning! If you are eating right now I suggest you move to another article and return to this one at a later time as the subject matter may ruin your appetite.

Our pets provide so much fun and happiness to our lives. However, no matter the type of animal, there is an unpleasant side to living with pets; poop, urine, vomit, and shedding, to name a few. Here, the focus will be on dogs and poop.

Whatever we call it, poop, feces, stool, etc., it can be an indicator of the health of a dog. When examining a sick dog or puppy a veterinarian will ask about its stool; the consistency, smell, and how often it occurs. Take time to pay attention to your pet's normal poop so you will recognize when a problem develops.

Most dogs defecate twice a day, usually around meal times. When they are sick or nervous they may poop more often, or not at all. In a moment of complete panic some dogs uncontrollably poop and/or pee right where they stand. Certain illnesses can result in constipation, diarrhea, or even projectile diarrhea. Of course feces smells, especially when its "fresh," but unusual odors can indicate illness. It could be an out of the ordinary sour, sweet, or more pungent smell than normal.

The size of the poop will vary depending on the size of the dog, how much they eat, and

the quality of their food. Foods containing a lot of grain or non-digestible fillers will result in more poop. When feeding lower-quality food, more (often twice the amount) is necessary to keep dogs at a proper body weight. When compared, the monetary cost can be about the same. However, dogs eating the higher quality food will be healthier and there will be less poop to clean up.

Keeping a dog's living environment free of feces is very important in prevention of the spread of parasites and disease. Some parasites and other organisms cannot be seen with the naked eye. The only way to determine if a problem micro-organism is present is to take a stool sample to a veterinary clinic to be examined under a microscope. If intestinal parasites can be visibly seen in the stool it is usually an indication of a high level of infestation. Intestinal worms are typically off-white or brownish in color. They can be as small as a half grain of rice or as large as a spaghetti noodle. Worms in stool can be alive and moving or dead. In either case the dog needs to be de-wormed. De-wormer should be purchased from a veterinary clinic to ensure it is the correct one for the type of worm present.

How dogs defecate can be an indicator of their mental state. Some dogs feel vulnerable to potential attack when they are relieving



themselves. Nervous, anxious, or fearful dogs often take a long time to pee or poop. They walk around and sniff the ground for ages before finally going. Some dogs may only feel comfortable going when their back is against a fence or bush. Some dogs who are nervous or hyperactive will spin in circles or walk as they eliminate. There are times when people think their dogs are not house-trained. In reality, their dogs are extremely fearful of the outside world, to the point they only feel safe eliminating inside the house. Work must be done on building the dog's self-confidence in order to resolve this problem.

Coprophagia is the scientific word for when animals eat poop. Some dogs eat the feces of other animals and/or their own. This is a usually a learned behavior from puppyhood, picked up from watching mom or another dog. This is a very difficult behavior to change. There are a lot of products on the market claiming to stop coprophagia, though in my

experience, most don't work, or only work for a short period of time. The best way to manage this issue is to clean up feces immediately, limiting the dog's opportunities to be able to practice the behavior.

Most dogs will eat cat poop if they can get to it. They see the litter box as a wonderful treat dispenser. It is important to keep dogs from eating poop from litter boxes containing clumping cat litter. If they eat too much of it there is the potential the litter could block the dog's digestive tract.

The Chinese philosophy of Yin Yang are two complimentary principles of dark and negative (Yin), and light and positive (Yang). Their interaction is thought to maintain harmony of the universe. I guess you could say the less than pleasant aspects of having dogs, their pee, poop, vomit, and shedding is the Yin, and the playful, loving, loyal side of dogs is the Yang. Even though we would prefer to not have to deal with the Yin, it is an important part of the health and well being of all living creatures. Taking time to get familiar with our dogs normal biological functions may one day help save their lives.

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Farewell to Toys R Us

by Dianne Flinn

Last month, my husband and I headed out with our daughter for one final trip to our local Toys R Us store in Durham. She had a little over \$6 left on a gift card from Christmas. It wasn't much, but hopefully with the steep discounts the chain was offering before it closed its doors forever, she could find a modest toy. We pulled up to find the large pothole scarred parking lot completely empty. The front windows were absent of any of the typical colorful advertising posters. A single sign apologetically notified potential shoppers that the store had closed and to please visit the other nearby locations in Greensboro, Raleigh and Cary. These locations were not exactly nearby, each over 30 miles away. It would cost us more in gas to get to one of those stores than the value of the gift card. Plus, by the time we got around to paying them a visit, it was likely that they too would be closed. My husband suggested the possibility of still ordering something online. A pop up on toysrus.com stated that the website had been shut down for online ordering, however the brick and mortar stores were open for business and were offering going out of business deals. Despite the circumstances, it was amusing to be advised to visit a store instead of ordering online.

When it was announced a few months ago that Toys R Us would be closing all its stores, my husband and I shared an instant sense of loss. After reading comments to the news online, I knew we weren't alone in blaming big, evil Amazon. Like other stores that have been struggling with rapidly decreasing revenue, Toys R Us couldn't compete with the low online prices, endless selection, and same-day shipping of the online behemoth. Back in the 1980's, my older brother and I would each receive a \$5 or \$10 gift card from our grandmother. It was all she could afford, but it was a huge treat for both of us. Our mom would designate a day to take us over to the store and we would spend hours perusing the treasure filled aisles to pick out just the right toy. My brother would usually find a great addition for his matchbox car collection. I remember bringing home a pocket-sized doll a few years in a row. With its dark brown 1970's style shingled roof and giant cartoon image of Geoffrey the Giraffe above the bubble lettered entrance welcoming shoppers, the Durham store resembles the one I visited up in Massachusetts as a child. A lot of different toys have come and gone, but the feeling I had being inside the store was the same. Geoffrey the Giraffe, the chain's mascot, symbolized birthdays, fun, and the specialness of those years that seem to go by in the blink of an eye.

Toys R Us was one of the last stores made just for kids. Sure, Walmart and Target dedicate a fair amount of square footage to toys in their stores, but parents usually don't take their kids to those places exclusively for that purpose. The toy aisles are usually an afterthought, a quick stop on the way up to the cash registers to purchase life's necessities. But isn't



that why Amazon has continued to overtake so many retailers in a relatively short period of time? Most busy adults don't have time to make separate trips for groceries, toiletries and hardware, never mind birthday presents. Many consumers now buy everything on Amazon. With a few clicks of the mouse or taps on the Smartphone, anything you could possibly need can be at your door in a day or two. No dragging the kids to the store, no parking, and no crowds. There are even thousands of videos available online, featuring someone else checking out the toy for you. But what we've gained in convenience, we've lost in joy. Watching someone else enjoying a train set is just not the same as role playing with the real thing with your child.

Maybe today's kids are too sophisticated for toy stores. With the push for incorporating STEAM in our schools, and children learning technical skills such as coding at increasingly younger ages, they don't have as much time to waste on pre-manufactured toys. Elementary schoolers are being encouraged to be innovators, to start thinking about how to solve the world's problems. And they need not wait until adulthood to do so. They are designing apps and robots. Some are even making more money than their parents with their own YouTube channels. At my daughter's school, a block of time each week is dedicated to "maker time". With donated paper towel and toilet paper tubes, plastic containers and other recycled materials, students are given the opportunity to design and execute custom inventions. Their imagination is the limit. This has been such a hit with my daughter, that virtually all her store-bought toys have been left to collect dust in favor of every piece of cardboard she can get her hands on. These cardboard contraptions could be the springboard for life-saving, or at least time saving innovations of the future. The old joke that kids enjoy playing with the box more than the toy is truer than ever. And with 3-D printing becoming more accessible to the general public, kids may soon be printing their own custom-designed toys, eliminating the need and desire for plastic toys mass produced overseas.

We never did make it to one of the other locations. I reasoned that we were better off having seen Toys R Us for the last time still full

of toys instead of stripped all the way down to its fixtures, which by the way were also for sale. I found out that it was too late to use the gift card anyway. According to toysrusclosingsale.com, a website created to provide consumers with more information about the store closing, April 21st was the last day Toys R Us gift cards would be accepted. The gift card remains in

my wallet, stuffed behind my credit cards and other unused gift cards. It will be the last Toys R Us gift card my daughter will ever receive, a souvenir of sorts. Maybe it could be used for maker time. Or it could be recycled, the plastic melted down and repurposed into something else. It could even have a future as an Amazon gift card. I know I'll soon forget it's in there, only to be found someday when I get around to cleaning out my wallet. I noticed that a new Hamrick's is moving into the empty space. The Toys R Us going out of business signs have been replaced by coming soon posters in the storefront windows. I've never been to a Hamrick's since the closest one is in Raleigh, over 30 miles away. Maybe I'll go with my family to check it out now that I won't have to drive so far. I wonder if they sell toys.

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HEAD START

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what they love to do by gaining direct experience and interdisciplinary study in a college setting. Brevard College's "Voice of the Rivers" program exemplifies its commitment to experiential education. Students develop personal and teamwork skills in a source-to-sea expedition. Each year at the end of the spring semester, students paddle a North Carolina river from its source to its discharge into the sea. One year, they actually paddled up the French Broad River to the Ohio River and then down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. Can you imagine what a learning experience that would be?

Eight years ago, Brevard students paddled the Haw and Cape Fear Rivers to Wilmington. They came back this year, and I was fortunate enough to help with their logistics while they were paddling the Haw River. It was a joy to spend time with them. It just so happened that 50 fourth graders from The Raleigh School were paddling with us when the Brevard flotilla came through Saxapahaw and stopped for some nourishment at a local eatery. The fourth graders were in awe as the Brevard students described their river adventure, what they had seen and how they all worked together while having fun canoeing and camping. One of the students said she was studying insects. Another talked about the turtles they saw every day. A student majoring in psychology said she was on the trip to learn about how individuals can work together in a group for the benefit of not

only the group but for each individual. A male student asked the fourth graders if they ever paddled 250 miles for a grade.

As I listened to the Brevard students and watched the faces of the fourth graders, I could not help but think how my life might have been different had I gone to a university that offered wilderness leadership and environmental education. Could I have cut out 50 years of experimentation and failed planning and still arrived to where I am in life right now? Would I be better at what I do now if I had not had so many fits and starts? Would an academic approach to understanding who I am and what I do have made me a better person? What about the people I have met along the way? As mentors, were they better or worse at demonstrating the life skills that are necessary in the paddlesports industry? What would I have done differently, if anything?

I recently heard that wisdom is nothing more than a life time of making mistakes and learning from them. Believe me, I am not suggesting that I am wise, but I sure have made many mistakes. Fortunately, none of them have lead to my demise.

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