

# The Ick Factor

## By Brenda Howard

Let's face it, there are many unsavory aspects of dog ownership and we might as well discuss them. Dogs are, after all, dogs!

**Dog Breath** – Dog's have dog breath. Once they move past the "skunky" breath of puppy-hood, they have big dog bad ol' breath. Among the things you can do to help alleviate the problem are brushing your dog's teeth, and adding a special tartar remover to his drinking water. The most important thing is to have his teeth cleaned by your veterinarian. Periodic teeth cleaning will not only help his breath, but will prevent tooth decay to go unnoticed which could cause even worse problems than bad breath.

**Feces Eating** – OOOooo Ick! Yes, many dogs will eat feces. Why? Well, as much as it has been researched, there is no clear reason. The rumor that something important is missing from the diet is not true. I personally believe some dogs do it because they are bored. Some female dogs learn to do it after taking care of a litter. Bottom line? It must taste good to them. Double Ick. There are a few advertised products that are supposed to prevent or deter this behavior, none of them work – at least none I've tried. So the only real answer to the problem is to pick up the poop from your yard. Pick up every day.

**Drooling (aka Slobber)** – Some breeds are worse than others about this. If dog spit is disgusting to you, be sure to research any breed you are interested in before making the leap to dog ownership. Generally, most "tight lipped" dogs drool very little. Loose lipped dogs such as boxers, bloodhounds, and bassets are pretty "spitty." Any dog will drool if you tease it with a tasty treat! I've owned drooly dogs for years and I have, for the most part, gotten past my aversion to slobber. I keep a "slobber towel" handy and duck and cover to avoid flying spit when my dogs shake their heads.

**Ear Wax** – Some breeds have little ear wax production and generally have very clean ears. Other breeds are not so lucky and manufacture a great deal of ear wax. Drop-ear dogs need to have their ears checked and cleaned frequently. Removing the built up wax and dirt keeps their ears from smelling and helps prevent infection by bacteria or fungus. Regular maintenance will keep your dog's ears healthy and smelling fine.

**Butt Sniffing** – All dogs do this. This is simply exchanging business cards in the dog world. Each dog has its own unique smell (just as we humans do – don't think about it!). When dogs are introduced to each other they go through several behaviors which tell the other dog "I'm cool with you if you are cool with me" – and butt sniffing is the primary behavior.

**Scooting** – Yes, more about butts. Dogs that scoot are doing it for a reason. They have an itch. The itch is caused by impacted or "full" anal glands. Anal glands are very small ducts that produce a lubricant that helps the dogs feces exit the body comfortably. I have had dogs that NEVER had a problem with anal glands. I have also had dog's that needed to have their anal glands expressed (squeezed by a professional – either the veterinarian or a trained groomer). This is not a job for the faint of heart. Anal gland excretions smell just AWFUL. If your dog has itchy rear, see your vet. Do not try to express the glands yourself with out being trained by your vet. The dog can be injured if this is done incorrectly. Personally, I think it's

worth every penny to have the vet or groomer do this as it is totally gross.

**Licking of Privates** – Well what would you like them to do? Use a wash cloth? No opposable thumbs make it hard for dogs to get clean without using their tongues. Cats do this too. This is natural. If you love your pets of the cat and dog variety, you just don't think about this. Bathe your dog when it needs it and just don't worry about the "lick baths."

**Fleas and Ticks and Worms** – Oh my. These can be just awful. It is your job as the care provider to make sure your dog is free of fleas, ticks and worms. Your veterinarian can help by prescribing monthly worm preventative which will take care of most of the worms that can invade canines including heart worms. A proper flea and tick treatment can be given monthly. Make sure your dog has clean bedding and clean drinking and eating bowls. Check your dog daily for pests by brushing or combing the coat. Keep your dog pest free!

**Face Licking** – If your sweet dog likes to give you a big ol' lick from time to time and it is not something you enjoy, teach him to not lick! Since I have already visited the subject of where that tongue has been, it's understandable if you would prefer your dog to keep his tongue in his head.

**Rolling in Smelly Things** – Dogs just love it. Love it. Love it. A dog will find a dead thing in the yard and roll all over it. Yep, and there's really not much to be done about it. Teach your dog "leave it." This will work great for you as long as you are with your dog when he finds the smelly thing on the ground. If he is alone, all bets are off and he'll roll until he can bring home the scent! Time for another bath.

This is a partial list of the many ick factor issues that can face dog owners. Why do we keep dogs? Because for every ick factor there are hundreds of wonderful, fun and entertaining factors that make owning a dog worth all the trouble.

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The information presented here is not intended to substitute for the advice and care of a veterinarian. Consult your veterinarian regarding all issues relating to your dog's health.

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