

The health measure you might be missing

It might not be the most glamorous topic in dog ownership, but your dog's poo is one of the clearest windows into their overall health. Changes in stool can signal issues with diet, digestion, parasites, stress, or illness. Poo is valuable data, and paying attention to it can make a real difference to your dog's wellbeing.

Your dog's daily health report

Healthy dog poo is a sign that a dog's digestive system is doing what it should: breaking down food efficiently, absorbing nutrients, and eliminating waste without irritation or inflammation. Because dogs typically toilet at least once a day, stool offers frequent, real-time feedback on how well their body is coping with food, environment, and lifestyle.

Unlike weight loss or coat changes, which can take weeks to notice, poo quality can change within days, and sometimes hours, of a problem emerging. That makes it one of the earliest warning systems available to dog owners.

What does healthy dog poo a like?

While there's some normal variation between dogs, healthy poo generally has a few consistent characteristics:

- **Firm but not hard:** It should hold its shape when picked up, without being crumbly or rock-solid.
- **Moist, not sticky or watery:** Easy to scoop, leaving little residue behind.
- **Consistent:** Occasional variation happens, but frequent swings between diarrhoea and constipation are a red flag.

What poor poo can be telling you

Unhealthy stools can point to a wide range of issues, including:

- Dietary intolerance or poor-quality food
- Sudden food changes
- Parasites or bacterial infections
- Stress or anxiety
- Underlying medical conditions, like inflammatory bowel disease

Loose stools, excessive mucus, blood, unusually strong odour, or persistent changes in frequency should never be ignored. While an off-day isn't usually cause for alarm, ongoing problems warrant closer attention and, often, a vet visit.

The importance of diet

One of the biggest influences on poo quality is diet. Highly digestible, nutritionally-balanced food tends to produce smaller, firmer stools because the dog's body is using what it eats. Poor-

quality or inappropriate food often leads to larger, smellier, or inconsistent poo, simply because more waste is being passed through unused.

This is why improvements in diet are often reflected quickly in stool quality. Many owners first notice the benefits of a better food not in shinier coats or higher energy, but in cleaner, more consistent poos.

Normalising the conversation

Talking about your dog's poo might feel awkward, but it shouldn't be. Normalising discussions about stool quality helps us catch problems and seek veterinary attention early.

Simply put: if you're not looking at your dog's poo, you're missing vital information. And you should be looking because responsible dog owners clean up after their dog!

Healthy dog poo is a sign that everything inside is working as it should. It reflects nutrition, gut health, emotional wellbeing, and disease status — all in one unassuming package. By paying attention, dog owners can make better decisions, spot problems early, and support their dog's long-term health.

Speaking from personal experience, we now have a NZ Canine IBD Support Group for all those dogs suffering from this challenging disorder: www.facebook.com/groups/nzcanineibdsupportgroup 

