

ASK OUR VETERINARIANS

Why Is My Dog Licking the Carpet?

So, you've noticed your dog licking the carpet in your house? Has your dog lost his mind or did someone spill something on the carpet and forget to tell you? What's going on here?

While there could be something tasty on the rug, chronic licking often signifies an underlying medical or behavioral problem. The main problems that may lead to excessive licking behavior in dogs are gastrointestinal problems, stress or anxiety or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

A variety of gastrointestinal diseases may cause nausea or pain and anxiety and lead dogs to lick to try to relieve the symptoms. Anything from parasites to food allergies to other illnesses that might cause stomach upset may cause a dog to repeatedly lick the floor or other surfaces. Licking may be an attempt to resolve excessive salivation secondary to nausea or it may be a way to try to reduce pain or anxiety as the repetitive motion of licking can release endorphins (chemicals in the brain) which reduce pain and have a calming effect. One word of caution: licking carpets could also potentially cause a foreign body in rare cases if large amounts of hair or carpet fibers are ingested.

Generalized stress, anxiety or even boredom or lack of stimulation may also cause excessive licking and release of those endorphins again. Increasing stimulation and exercising your dog may reduce this behavior. In some cases, anti-anxiety medications may be helpful.

Finally, dogs can also develop a type of obsessive-compulsive behavior. OCD is not common, but it does affect some pets and can lead to tail chasing, "fly snapping" and behaviors like chronic licking. Treatment may involve behavior modification and medications to control the symptoms.

The bottom line is, if your dog is exhibiting abnormal or chronic licking of rugs or other surfaces, it is best to talk to your veterinarian to rule out medical causes that might explain your pet's odd behavior. If she receives a clean bill of health, question the family to see what was spilled and break out the carpet cleaner!

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