

What's That Foul Odor? 7 Reasons Your Dog Stinks – And How to Fix Them

Dogs get blamed for the craziest things — like foul smells. Honestly, your dog shouldn't stink. He may not smell like roses or baby powder, but shouldn't smell like Fritos, rotten fish, or bad breath. And hopefully you'll never suffer with the stench of No. 7 on this list either.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- When discussing stinky dogs, it's important to understand there's a big difference between a normal, healthy doggy smell and a dog who stinks
- There are many reasons dogs develop unpleasant odors, including yeast infections, anal gland problems, gassiness and poor oral health
- Many dogs, if allowed, will deliberately stink themselves up in a variety of creative, canine-inspired ways
- Other pets in the household are often the first to recognize a change in a sick animal's smell. If you have a multi-pet home, pay attention to how the other animals approach or avoid your stinky pet
- If you don't know what to do next, partner with an integrative or functional medicine veterinarian to explore treatment options

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published April 21, 2019.

Today we're discussing some of the more common reasons dogs get stinky. Now, some people think their canine companion should smell like a freshly bathed baby. The truth is, dogs aren't supposed to smell like humans, but they also shouldn't stink.

Dogs have their own canine smell that varies from individual to individual, but it's not unpleasant. You should be able to bury your nose in your dog's fur and inhale his own unique doggy scent. A healthy dog eating a balanced, species-appropriate diet who is regularly brushed and bathed shouldn't smell bad. If your dog is stinky, there's a reason and you need to find out what it is. The following are some possible causes you should investigate.

Reason No. 1 — A Yeast Infection

Yeast overgrowth is a very common cause of smelly dogs. Yeast has a very distinct musty, pungent odor that is often compared to moldy bread or cheese popcorn. Some people actually call a yeast infection on their dog's paws "Frito feet," because the smell is similar to corn chips.

Stinky paws or a musty smell, especially around the ears, is usually a sign of yeast overgrowth. So is scratching. Itchy ears, itchy paws and butt scooting are all signs of a potential problem with yeast.

Reason No. 2 — Anal Gland Issues

Inflamed, infected or impacted anal glands will often cause your dog to have an unpleasant odor. The anal glands or sacs sit just inside the rectum, one on either side of the anus at about 8:00 o'clock and 4:00 o'clock. When a dog poops, the glands secrete a very smelly, oily substance thought to be a territorial marker.

If there's a buildup of secretions in the anal glands, and especially if your dog spends any time licking or digging around back there, you'll notice a very distinct stink that is often compared to rotting fish.

Reason No. 3 — Gassiness

Passing gas, aka farting or flatulence can also be the reason for a smelly dog. If you've ever driven any distance with a gassy dog in a vehicle with the windows rolled up, you know what this is. Some flatulence is normal, and in healthy pets it's not terribly stinky. It's typically just ingested air that comes out the other end.

However, if your dog passes gas that clears the room, something is wrong. There are several reasons dogs create excessive amounts of gas, including a poor diet, a food allergy, lack of digestive enzymes, an unbalanced microbiome or **intestinal parasites**.

If your dog's smelly gas is more or less constant, it's time to make an appointment with your functional medicine veterinarian, especially if he has other symptoms of a gastrointestinal (GI) issue like abdominal distension, intermittent loose stools or vomiting, itching around the anus, constipation or weight loss.

Reason No. 4 — A Stinky Face (Including Ears and/or Eyes)

If your dog has an unpleasant odor but you can't seem to locate the source of it, check her face, because as mentioned earlier, a yeast overgrowth can be the cause. Ear infections, either due to yeast, which is a fungus, or bacteria, can create a musty odor inside the ear.

The problem could also be ear mites, which secrete a waxy debris that has a very strong odor. Bottom line, when you lift your dog's earflaps and look inside, there should be nothing to see down the ear canals. They shouldn't be red and there shouldn't be any discharge or gunk. If there's a smelly accumulation in there, you should investigate further.

If your dog's ears aren't the source of the smell, check out the areas around her eyes. Facial folds, including the moist areas under a dog's eyes, can also hold yeast or bacteria that has an odor. Veterinarians call this a moist pyoderma or a localized skin infection that often occurs either in the lip folds or under the eyes.

Reason No. 5 — A Stinky Mouth

Your dog's breath will obviously never smell like yours does after you've brushed and flossed, but it shouldn't be overwhelmingly stinky. If your pet's mouth is clean and he's otherwise healthy, his doggy breath shouldn't be offensive. There really shouldn't be much mouth odor at all unless he's just eaten, in which case you might smell the remains of his meal on his breath.

If your dog has really bad breath, something is definitely wrong. Chronic bad breath in pets has the same causes as halitosis in humans. Most often it's poor oral hygiene, which can cause all kinds of bad smells, but sometimes something wrong in the GI tract can be the culprit.

Reason No. 6 — A Poor Diet and/or Food Sensitivities

What you feed your dog affects her body both inside and out. A dog fed a biologically inappropriate diet or one that contains ingredients she's sensitive to is at risk for a wide variety of illnesses, some of which can give her an unpleasant odor. This is especially true for dogs with poor skin and coat condition due to a problem that started with their diet. Often these pets are deficient in omega-3 fatty acids.

A lifetime of highly processed, inappropriate pet food can lead to many illnesses that create odors, including a change in systemic pH or acid-base balance. A poor diet can also lead to impaired detoxification mechanisms, which can result in organ dysfunction and diseases like diabetes and cancer. All of these can cause your dog to give off an unpleasant odor.

Other pets in the household are often the first to recognize a change in a sick animal's smell. If you have a multi-pet home, pay attention to how the other animals approach or avoid your stinky pet.

Reason No. 7 — Your Dog Is Just Being a Dog

Some dogs deliberately make themselves stinky. Some will roll in another animal's poop if they get the chance. Some will eat the poop of other animals or even their own. Some dogs roll in dead animal remains. Others pick up dead, decomposing animals in their mouths and carry them around, swallow them or present them to their owners as gifts.

If your furry family member has one of these distasteful tendencies, all you can really do is supervise him closely and limit his opportunities to channel his wilder nature. If he does manage to roll in something offensive or sample some random poop, a bath or a round of tooth brushing should get rid of the smell.

So, there you have it — the most common reasons dogs get stinky. Each of these issues requires a closer look at the underlying cause. Consider them a sign something isn't quite right and take advantage of the opportunity they provide to take a proactive approach to your dog's health.

Don't ignore your dog's odor. If you don't know what to do next, partner with an integrative or functional medicine veterinarian to explore treatment options. Resolving any underlying issues is very important.
