

The 10 most-searched questions about dogs

We know you've "Googled" when it comes to your pet. In fact, Google released the 10 most-searched questions pet owners asked about their dogs last year. So, instead of leaving the answers to a Google algorithm, here are some veterinary experts to answer your queries so you can get to the bottom of questions like, "Why are dogs' noses wet?"

Google is a great tool, but if you ever have a question regarding your pet, never hesitate to contact us. We're here to answer the serious to merely curious questions—we're happy to do it! In the meantime, see how Drs. John Ciribassi, DVM, DACVB, and Ernie Ward, DVM, answer your most pressing questions about Fido.



1. Why do dogs eat grass?

> Most veterinarians agree grass eating seems to be a way for dogs to relieve gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms, parasites or possibly infections. Another theory is that dogs are craving micronutrients found in

leafy plants. Finally, dogs may eat grass simply because they like it. —*Dr. Ward*



2. Do dogs dream?

> We've discovered that dogs and humans share many similar characteristics when sleeping and possibly dreaming. For most dogs, dreaming should occur about 20 minutes after they begin to doze. You'll notice shallow, irregular breathing

followed by muscle twitching and eye movements behind closed eyelids. The real question is what do dogs dream about? —*Dr. Ward*



3. Why do dogs howl?

> Howling is a non-specific behavior. Howling can occur when a dog is distressed, feeling territorial, stressed in a situation that they cannot get out of, or responding to persistent noises such as the sound of a siren. Finally, I imagine it is a

fun activity for some dogs—kind of like singing in the shower. —*Dr. Ciribassi*

> Wolves primarily howl to alert an enemy pack they're ready to rumble or guide a lost member home. Dogs howling when you leave may be an attempt to get you to return. Howling at other dogs may signal, "Get lost!" or "I'm over here!" —*Dr. Ward*

4. Why do dogs have whiskers?

> Whiskers function as sensory organs.

Touch, air currents and vibrations can stimulate the whiskers. They also can function as communication in that dogs that are emotionally aroused can move their whiskers forward or backward

to signal to another dog either fear or confidence during encounters. —*Dr. Ciribassi*

> Most dogs have these long, stiff hairs projecting from their jaw, muzzle and above their eyes. Whiskers are highly sensitive and help inform the dog about surrounding objects, air movements and more. You can also tell a dog is nervous or scared if the whiskers are pointing forward at a potential threat. Whatever you do, don't trim or pluck whiskers because they serve an important information source for dogs. —*Dr. Ward*



5. Why do dogs chase their tails?

> Other than for grooming or injury reasons, it is abnormal for dogs to consistently chase their tails. It can occur as an attention-getting activity or can escalate to a compulsive behavior that interferes with normal activities. Compulsive behaviors are similar to obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) in people and one theory is that it results in an increase in endorphins in the brain thus acting to reinforce pleasure for the behavior. —*Dr. Ciribassi*



6. How do you clean dogs' ears?

> Cleaning ears regularly can help minimize infection since dry, clean ears are less likely to become infected. Place a small amount of a quality cleaning agent in the ear and massage the base of the ear. Allow your pet to shake its head then wipe out the discharge using cotton



or tissue on your finger. Do not place anything into the ear unless directed by your veterinarian. I recommend cleaning a normal ear (not complicated by allergies or infections) about one to two times per week or after baths. —*Dr. Ciribassi*

> Start by gently cleaning the outer ear with a clean cotton ball and veterinary-approved ear cleaning solution. Be sure to remove any debris and dead skin from crevices and folds. Using a clean cotton ball, push as far into the ear canal as you can comfortably reach with your small finger. Be sure not to stuff the cotton ball so deep you can't retrieve it. Remove the cotton ball and repeat until there is no more dirt or debris observed. —*Dr. Ward*

7. Why are dogs' noses wet?



> Dogs' noses act as sweat glands and can become wet as a means of discharging heat. In addition, nasal cavity discharge will accumulate on the nose. Clear discharge can occur with temperature changes and also with some allergies. Discolored discharges usually indicate possible

infection, neoplasia, foreign body or bleeding disorder in the nasal cavity and should be evaluated as soon as possible. —*Dr. Ciribassi*

> Wet noses increase a dog's ability to smell. Scientists believe the thin layer of mucous on a "wet nose" helps trap scent chemicals that are then licked off and processed by a dog's special olfactory (smelling) glands located in the roof of its mouth. Wet noses are also the result of specialized sweat glands. Dogs can only perspire from the pads of their feet and noses. —*Dr. Ward*

8. How do you stop dogs from digging?



> Dogs dig because it is fun or for exploration. This is a normal behavior, but will escalate if unmanaged. Don't allow dogs in areas unsupervised where they have dug before, block off problem areas, be in the yard to prevent digging and engage your dog with activities. You can provide a digging box or area with sand or dirt that

your dog can easily dig in. You can encourage its use by burying favorite toys (first shallow then more deeply) in the box. —*Dr. Ciribassi*

9. How do you introduce dogs to ... (babies, cats, etc.)?

> The first rule of introducing dogs to babies or new pets is supervision. Next, take it slow. Keep the parties separated and allow them to see, hear and smell the visitor. Back off at any sign of anxiety, fear or threats. If a new baby is at the hospital, try bringing home a blanket with the newborn's smell for your pet. Make sure to keep food and prized possessions away during introduction. Once everyone is acclimated to each other, carefully allow direct contact. After a short period, take a break and start over in five to 15 minutes. Regardless of how long you've had your pet or how nice it is, never allow unsupervised interaction between an animal and baby. —*Dr. Ward*



10. Why do dogs bury bones?

> Animals frequently create food caches (hiding spots for valuables they can later access when safe or normal food supplies are no longer available). Even though you may supply all the food your dog may want, it is difficult to break a natural, instinctual behavior. —*Dr. Ciribassi*

> When dogs bury bones, they're making an instinctual deposit to protect a future meal or prized possession. Thousands of years ago, scavenging dogs weren't certain where or when their next meal would be. If they scored a big find, they'd hide leftovers for leaner times. Burying food kept it dark and cool, an early version of refrigeration. —*Dr. Ward*



Dr. John Ciribassi, DVM, DACVB, founded the animal behavior specialty practice *Chicagoland Veterinary Behavior Consultants* with locations in Buffalo Grove, Bensenville and Chicago, Illinois. Ciribassi is a board certified veterinary behaviorist. Dr. Ciribassi and his wife, Elise, also a veterinarian, own and practice at *Carol Stream Animal Hospital* in Carol Stream, Illinois. He is a 1984 graduate of the *University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine* and has served as president of the *Chicago Veterinary Medical Association* as well as president of the *American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB)*.



Dr. Ernie Ward, DVM, a veterinarian, author, speaker and media personality, has dedicated his life and career to promoting a healthier lifestyle for people and pets. Known as "America's Pet Advocate," Ward founded the *Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP)* in 2005 to help raise awareness about the dangers of excess weight in dogs and cats. A 1992 graduate of the *University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine*, Ward began his career with his clinic, *Seaside Animal Care*, in 1993. He lives with his wife and daughters in coastal North Carolina where he is also a certified personal trainer; USA Triathlon certified coach and multiple Ironman finisher.

