



Paw Prints

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Columnist

Why do dogs lick?

You may treasure the slobbery greeting your furry friend gives you upon your return home each day, but do you ever wonder why they do it?

Dogs use their tongue to explore objects, animate or inanimate. Just as you are connected to the world through your senses, canines use their sense of taste to identify and recognize things around them.

Dogs lick their pet parents, other dogs, themselves and sometimes anything that smells tasty for a variety of reasons ranging from love and an expression of submission to a possible medical condition.

Here are some common reasons your pooch might be offering up canine kisses:

Dogs are affectionate animals and display their love for humans in many ways, but mostly by licking us. Licking out of affection causes your dog to release pleasurable endorphins that calm and comfort him. Dog licks aren't the same thing

as kisses, but they can still be signs of affection or approval.

How many times have you seen your dog licking his bowl or the floor after a spill? You might conclude that he simply likes the taste. Your furry friend might be licking you just because you taste good! This may be caused by traces of food on your skin or just the taste of salt and scents on your skin.

Dogs lick other dogs to tell them all sorts of things. Everything from "I'm hungry" to "I submit to you" to "Let's be friends." Dogs who are already friends will trade licks. Two strongly bonded canine pals will lick and groom each other. They give each other "smooches" in displays of affection and friendship. These dogs know and trust each other and their social hierarchy is not an issue. Licking can be normal, social behavior, but when done excessively on a specific area of another dog it may signal a medical problem that needs investigating. A good place to start is to have the licked dog checked by a vet to rule out medical issues. Dogs have shown an uncanny ability to recognize medical problems.

Sometimes a dog will lick people to attract attention. There are many ways Rover might attract your attention, including a tap using his paw, a nose nudge and barking. But possibly if your furry friend notices that you do not pay attention to these attempts, he may resort to licking.

Your dog could also be

licking to show submission. Wild puppies lick their mother's mouth as a signal for her to regurgitate the meat she's hunted and as a way of demonstrating subordination.

Your dog may be licking you simply because he is hungry. Wild dogs tend to lick the face of their pack leader to beg for food. Additionally, puppies will lick their mother's lips when hungry.

Did you know that dogs are concerned with hygiene and often lick themselves, just like cats? However, pay close attention because excessive anal cleaning can indicate that his glands need to be expressed.

Dogs also lick to heal themselves. Dog saliva has enzymes that kill off bacteria, and when a dog licks himself, it helps to get rid of dead tissue and clean dirt from wounds.

Of course, there are those times when licking may become excessive. If you notice that Rover is licking the same object or area over and over, it might be time to seek medical help. While licking can be a healthy

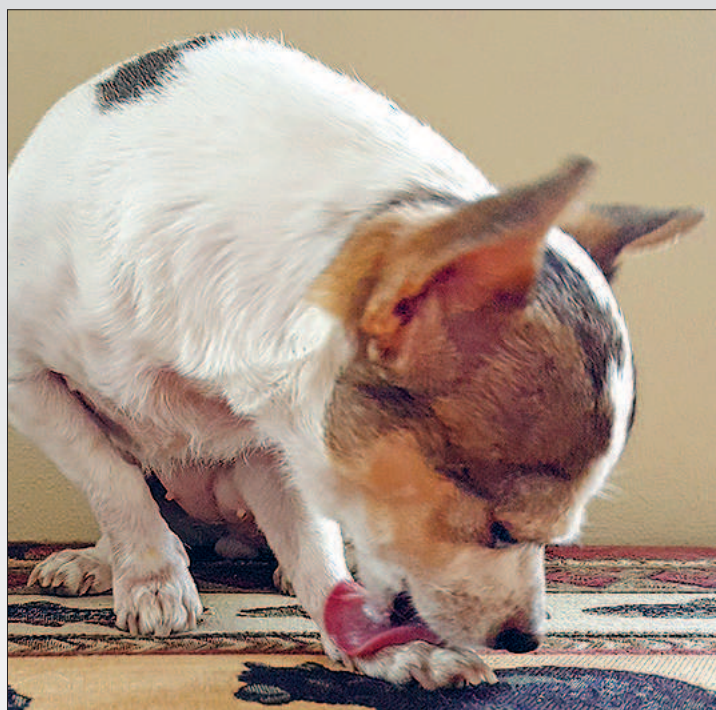


PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Mia grooming herself. Licking behavior can mean many different things.

stress-reliever, obsessive licking reinforces anxiety and makes the problem worse.

Dogs are practically licked into life. Upon entering this strange world of ours, the first sensation

newborn puppies feel is their mother's nurturing tongue. Mom uses it to clear away her litter's nostrils and encourage each puppy to breathe. From that moment onward, the licking really never stops.

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