

Ditch These 6 Outdated Urban Legends, and Your Pet's Care Will Blossom

Continuing to believe these cherished myths can sour your quality of care for your pet — no matter your pet's age and stage of life. And No. 1 can put your health at risk as well. Do you still believe these myths that have outlived their time? Your dog may be in trouble.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Myths about dogs persist — even some really nutty ones
- Some doggy folklore is harmless enough, but belief in certain myths can actually interfere with the care you give your canine companion
- One myth that definitely deserves discrediting is the old saw “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks”
- As for grass eating, most healthy dogs fed a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet don't eat grass because they receive all the nourishment their bodies need from their food, and they rarely suffer from digestive issues
- Regardless of her history, it's very important that training continues throughout your dog's lifetime to help her remain a well-balanced canine citizen

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Many dog parent today still cling to certain myths or "old wives' tales" about their canine companion. Much of this folklore is just silly and harmless, but unfortunately, some tall tales about the nature of dogs can prevent pet owners from providing proper care to their canine companions.

6 Dog Myths That Deserve Debunking

1. **Your dog's mouth is cleaner than the average human's — Myth debunked:** Dogs' mouths are overflowing with all kinds of bacteria, all the time. Think about it: your dog uses his mouth to do many of the same things you do with your hands ... right before you wash them.

Dogs also lick their backsides, sniff the rear-ends of other pets, sample poop, pick up dead animals in their mouths, shove their noses into dirt, lick shoes, chew on socks and underwear — you get the idea.

Now, this doesn't mean you should push your pet away when he tries to lick you, because honestly, what's better than puppy kisses?

However, your pet's mouth might at times harbor harmful bacteria, so it's a good idea after a slobbery pooch smooth to wash up with soap and water, especially if you are immunosuppressed.

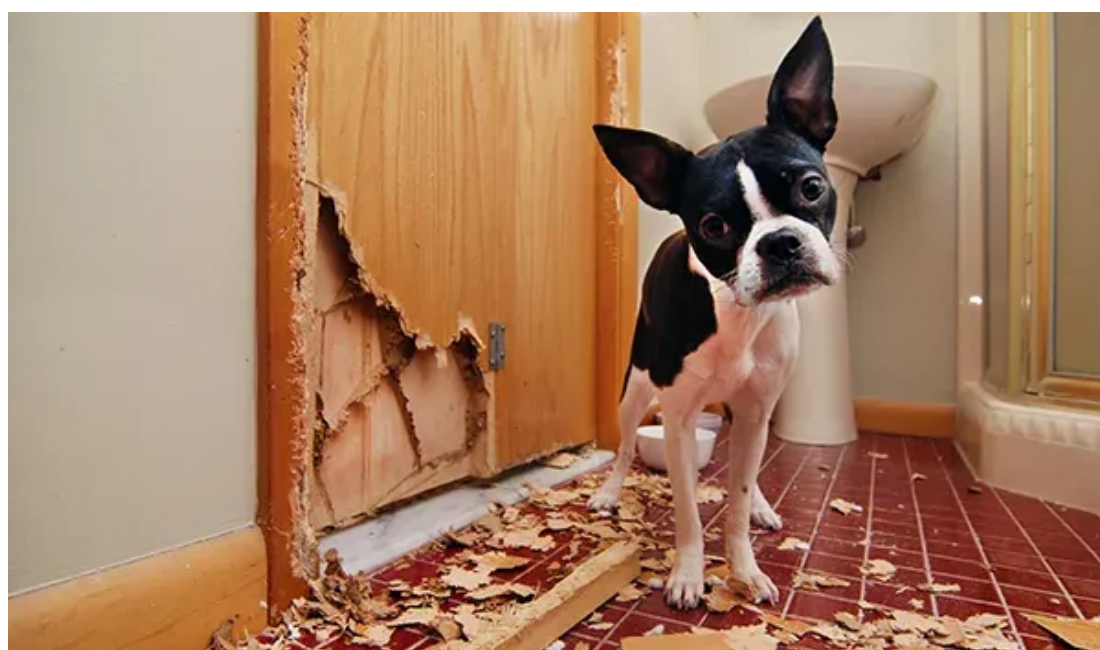
2. **Dogs have naturally stinky breath — Myth debunked:** First of all, anyone who thinks a dog's breath should be minty fresh is barking up the wrong tree (pun intended). (Humans' breath isn't naturally minty fresh, either, by the way.) Healthy "doggy breath" doesn't smell like human breath, but it shouldn't be offensive.

Hands down the most common reason for stinky dog breath is a problem with the teeth and/or gums. And the most common reason for tooth and gum problems is lack of **home dental care**.

It doesn't make much sense to expect a dog whose teeth are rarely or never brushed to have fresh breath, now does it?

Since GI disorders and other health problems also sometimes cause bad breath, if your dog's mouth is clean but his breath is still stinky, make an appointment with your veterinarian.

3. **Dogs have a "guilty look" — Myth debunked:** Many dogs have facial expressions that look a whole lot like guilt to their humans, but according to canine behaviorists, that hangdog look, you know the one — lowered head, ears back, pleading eyes — is simply your pet's reaction to the hissy fit you're throwing over something he did earlier.



In one of the first scientific studies on dogs and feelings of guilt and shame, author Alexandra Horowitz observed that the dogs assumed "the look" most often when their owners reprimanded them, regardless of whether or not they had disobeyed.¹

And in fact, the dogs reacted more to a scolding when they had behaved themselves than when they were disobedient. According to Horowitz, the dogs weren't displaying guilt, but a reaction to the owner's tone of voice.

However, she doesn't rule out the possibility that dogs may feel guilt — she simply points out that "the look" isn't an indication of it.

4. **Dogs eat grass only when they feel sick — Myth debunked:** If your otherwise healthy, well-nourished dog nibbles on selected grass once in awhile, there's no cause for concern. (Unless, of course, the grass has been treated with chemicals.)

Dogs who selectively choose grasses to nibble on may be seeking out specific nutrients (many grasses are high in potassium, phytonutrients and enzymes) or looking for a natural source of fiber.

However, if your dog is frantically eating the first patch of grass she finds, it could mean a GI problem is brewing.

Dogs with IBS, IBD, gastritis, enteritis, maldigestion and malabsorption instinctively search for natural remedies for the occasional upset stomach, and grass often does the trick, not to mention it's usually easy to find.

There's something about the texture of grass that triggers vomiting or a bowel movement in many dogs, which relieves tummy discomfort. But if your dog's grass eating is chronic and especially if it causes her to vomit frequently, it's time to make an appointment with your veterinarian.

In the meantime, consider upgrading your dog's diet if she's still eating kibble or any non-human grade commercial dog food.

Most healthy dogs fed a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet don't eat grass because they receive all the nourishment their bodies need from their food, and they rarely suffer from digestive issues caused from food.

If you're sure your dog is receiving optimal nutrition from a species-appropriate diet but she still eats a notable amount of grass, consider growing your own sunflower sprouts. Sprouts can provide an easy, inexpensive source of fresh, live, organic vegetation and are much more nutritious for your pet than grass.

5. **Older dogs can't be socialized or trained/retrained — Myth debunked:** This is utter nonsense! In a perfect world, every puppy would receive excellent socialization and training at precisely the right age. The reality is that this is more the exception than the rule for most dogs. While it's true a puppy's behavior is typically easier to mold than an older dog's, it is by no means impossible to teach an adult dog new behaviors (and extinguish undesirable ones) through positive reinforcement training.

In fact, regardless of her history, it's very important that training continues throughout your dog's lifetime to help her remain a well-balanced canine citizen. Lifelong **socialization** is also important for the mental stimulation it provides, as well as to nip emerging behavior problems in the bud.

6. **Dogs are colorblind and can only see shades of black and gray — Myth debunked:** Like you, your canine companion can see colors — just not as many of them. The human retina contains three types of color-detecting cells (cones), whereas dogs have just two. Color vision scientist Jay Neitz, Ph.D., at the University of Washington says dogs see colors similar to the way red-green colorblind people see them.²

What humans with normal vision see as the color red probably appears dark brown to dogs, while greens, yellows and oranges appear yellowish. The blue-green color of the ocean appears gray to your dog, and anything purple looks blue. However, dogs see and detect movement better in dim light than humans because their retinas contain a much higher ratio of rods to cones than ours do.

Sources and References

[VetStreet](#)

¹ [Behav Processes. 2009 Jul;81\(3\):447-52](#)

² [LiveScience, June 27, 2014](#)