

Chronic Licking

Is your dog licking everything in sight? Read on.

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Q. I have a 1-½-year-old Chihuahua mix that weighs 12 pounds and is quite skinny. As far as I can tell, he's healthy, and recently received a clean bill of health from his vet. My pooch has lots of energy, eats and poops normally.

He has just started a new behavior that I'm a little concerned about. He keeps flicking his tongue out, kind of like a snake. He has also started licking everything including my pants, the couch or whatever, and thirst does not seem to be the issue.

A. A Chihuahua with a snakelike tongue? Your little guy has discovered what many dog owners already know: dogs have very long tongues. I would guess this activity is a behavioral problem, and relatively harmless at that. If it bothers you, you can use some straightforward techniques to discourage this behavior.

You didn't mention your dog's name, so let's call him Cobra. When Cobra starts his tongue flicking, licking behavior, divert him with a treat, and if he stops, reward him with affection. After awhile, you should not have to give a treat. You can also use negative reinforcement in the form of a [water] spray bottle, and give him a couple of brisk face sprays. Don't forget to reward him with affection when he stops.

Do not give additional attention when he does it, however, or he may simply continue doing this for the attention. You are dealing with the equivalent of a 10-year-old child here.

On the other hand, you could probably ignore the behavior and he will probably grow out of it and discover newer, more exciting ways to entertain his little Chihuahua brain.

And remember, that you may not want him to lick your face, because you never know where a dog has been licking. Actually, the problem is, you do know where he has been licking.

Best, Jon Geller, DVM

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