

Anal Gland Disease in Dogs

**What are anal glands?**

The anal glands are located on either side of the anus at the nine o’clock and three o’clock positions. They are positioned just under the skin and connect to the anus through small canals or ducts. Anal glands produce and store a dark, foul-smelling fluid. These are similar to the glands a skunk uses to scare away its enemies.

Although dogs can use these for the same purpose, most dogs live in an environment that has no enemies. Because the glands are rarely emptied, the fluid builds up, solidifies and becomes an ideal environment in which bacteria can grow.

**What kinds of problems can occur in the anal glands?**

There are three diseases that occur in the anal glands:

* When the fluid becomes thick and solidified, the condition is called impaction.
* When bacteria grow in the anal glands and produce a yellow or bloody pus, the condition is called infection.
* When the infection builds to create a hot, tender swelling in the gland, the condition is called an abscess. When the abscessed material overflows the gland, the skin over the gland breaks open and the pus drains onto the skin.

**How will I know if my dog is having problems with his/her anal glands?**

Symptoms of anal gland disease are:

* Scooting or dragging the anal area
* Excessive licking under the tail
* Pain near the tail or anus
* A swollen area on either side of the anus
* Bloody or sticky drainage on either side of the anus

**How are the various anal gland diseases treated?**

The treatment for impaction is to express the glands and clean out the solidified material. For infection, the glands must be expressed and antibiotics administered to kill the bacteria. If the glands abscess, the abscess must be surgically drained and antibiotics administered.

**My dog has had several bouts of anal gland disease. Is there a long-term cure?**

Many dogs have recurrent anal gland disease. Some factors, like breed and weight, can predispose dogs to these problems. If a dog has several episodes of anal gland disease, the anal glands can be removed surgically. Because these glands are virtually unused, there is no loss to the dog. It is the only way to permanently cure the problem.

**Are there any complications with the surgery?**

Surgery requires general anesthesia which always carries some degree of risk, whether the patient is a dog or a person. However, modern anesthetics make this risk very minimal for dogs that are otherwise healthy.

Some dogs will experience a temporary lack of bowel control. This occurs because the nerves that control the anus are very near the anal glands and may be damaged during surgery. However, this is almost always a temporary problem that will resolve itself in a few days to a couple of weeks.

**My dog frequently leaves a foul-smelling drop of liquid on the furniture. Is this related to anal gland disease?**

Some dogs are born with anal canals that do not close well. These dogs are constantly draining anal gland fluid and leaving a foul-smelling drop wherever they have been. This is another indication for anal gland removal since there does not appear to be any other way to stop this and dogs do not outgrow this problem.