

ANAL SAC DISEASE

What are anal sacs?

Anal sacs (also called anal glands) are two small glands just inside your pet's anus. The material secreted into these glands is thick and foul-smelling. Most animals can empty these glands voluntarily for scent marking or in self-defense, like a skunk might do.

Domestic animals have largely lost their ability to empty these sacs voluntarily. Walking around and normal defecation serves to empty the glands but some animals become unable to empty their glands at all on their own.

What disorders can occur in the anal sacs?

There are three diseases that occur in the anal sacs.

- 1) When the fluid becomes thick and solidified, the condition is called **impaction**.
- 2) When bacteria grow in this material producing a yellow or bloody discharge, the condition is called **infection**.
- 3) 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 sac, the skin over the sac breaks open and the fluid drains onto the skin.

How will I know if my dog is having problems with its anal sacs?

Symptoms of anal sac disease are:

- 1) Scooting or dragging the anal area.
- 2) Excessive licking under the tail.
- 3) Pain, sometimes severe, near the tail or anus.
- 4) A swollen area on either side of the anus.
- 5) Bloody or sticky drainage on either side of the anus.

How are the various anal sac diseases treated?

The treatment for **impaction** is to express the sacs and clean out the solidified material. For **infection**, the sacs must be expressed and antibiotics administered to kill the bacteria. For cases of severe impaction or infection it may be necessary to flush the sacs under sedation to fully empty them.

If the sacs **abscess**, the abscess must be drained and antibiotics administered. Anal sac abscess may require surgery to completely drain the fluid.

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

Many dogs have recurrent anal sac disease. Some breeds of dogs, such as Poodles, commonly have problems. The anal sacs of obese dogs do not drain well, and thus these dogs are predisposed to recurrent problems.

For dogs with recurrent impaction addition of fiber to the diet is often recommended. This increases the consistency of the dog's stool and may allow the sacs to empty naturally. The most commonly recommended sources are canned pumpkin or squash.

If a dog has recurrent episodes of infection or abscess, the anal sacs can be removed surgically. Because these sacs 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 temporary lack of good bowel control. They may drop fecal balls as they walk. This occurs because the nerves that control the anus are very near the anal sacs 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.