



ANAL SAC DISEASE

What are the anal sacs?

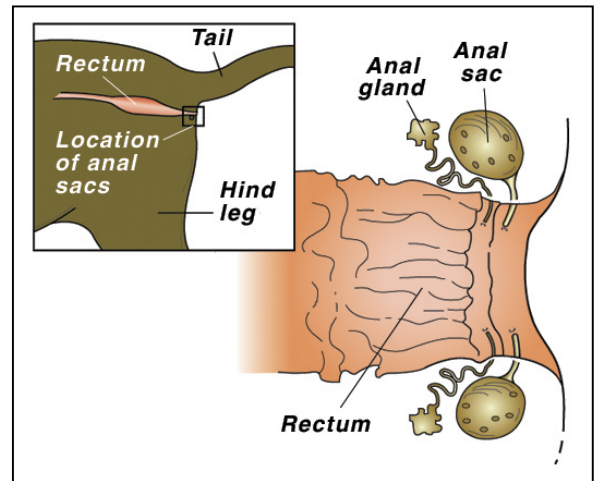
Popularly called ‘anal glands’, these are two small pouches located on either side of the anus at approximately the 4 o’clock and 8 o’clock positions. The sacs are lined with numerous specialized sebaceous (skin) glands that produce a foul smelling secretion. Each sac is connected to the outside by a small duct which opens just inside the anus.

What is their function?

The secretion acts as a territorial marker – an animal’s ‘calling card’. The ‘glands’ are present in both sexes (males and females) dogs and cats. Normally they empty when the animal defecates. This is why they are so interested in one another’s feces.

Why are they important?

Anal gland (sac) disease is very common in dogs. The sacs can become impacted because the opening becomes plugged. The fluid becomes thick and eventually hardens making it painful to pass feces. The material within the anal sacs is an ideal medium on which bacteria can multiply so that an abscess can easily form, which results in a red, painful swelling on one or both sides of the anus indicating the presence of an abscess. These abscesses often burst and release greenish yellow or bloody pus. If untreated, the infection can quickly spread and cause severe damage to the anus and rectum.



How will I know if my dog has anal sac problems?

The first sign is often scooting or dragging the rear along the ground. There may be excessive licking or biting, often at the root of the tail rather than the anal area. Anal sac impaction and infection is very painful. Even normally gentle dogs may snap or growl if you touch the tail or anus when they have anal sac disease. If the anal sac ruptures, you may see blood or pus draining from the rectum.

What should I do?

Problems with the anal gland are common in all dogs, regardless of size or breed. These problems are much less common in cats, but do occur. If you are concerned that your pet may have an anal sac problem, do not hesitate to call us. Treatment for impaction involves flushing and removal of the solidified material. Since this condition is painful, many pets will require a sedative or an anesthetic. Antibiotics are often prescribed and sometimes instilled into the glands over a period of several days, or given orally. In chronic cases, surgery may be necessary.

Is the condition likely to recur?

Many pets will have recurrent anal sac impaction due to blocking of the secretions in the ducts or the sacs themselves. If this recurs frequently, surgical removal of the sacs is indicated since repeated treatment often results in scarring and narrowing of the duct. Are anal glands necessary? Will removal have any adverse effects? Will my pet miss them?

Anal glands produce the pungent smelling secretion that allows the dog to define his or her territory. For our domesticated animals, this is unnecessary and will not adversely affect your pet.

Are there any other risks attached to surgery?

This is a specialized surgery. Many veterinarians perform this procedure routinely; however, veterinary surgical specialists may be recommended depending on the severity of your pet's condition. The primary concern is permanent damage to the nerves that allow the anus to close. This can result in fecal incontinence or the inability to control bowel movements. While this is rare, we want to minimize the risk of any complication for your pet. Some dogs will experience loose stools or lack of bowel control for one to three weeks following surgery. This resolves without further treatment in the majority of pets. As with any surgery, there are risks and potential complications. Today's modern anesthetics and surgical techniques ensure that these risks are minimized. For pets suffering from chronic anal sac infection or impaction, surgery is the only permanent cure.

My dog is very nervous and sometimes seems to express his own glands. Is this normal?

It is common for animals to express their anal sacs, particularly if frightened. Some pets even appear to lack control of the anus or anal sac ducts so that small quantities of fluid will drain out when they are resting. This, of course, leaves an unpleasant lingering odor in the home. For pets with this condition, surgery is usually recommended.