

## Anal Glands & Anal Sacs

### What are anal glands?

Anal glands line the anal sacs of both the dog and cat. They are located on each side of the anus, just under the skin at four and seven o' clock. The glands produce a foul smelling substance that collects in the anal sacs empties through a small tube as your dog or cat defecates. They serve the purpose of scent marking. Scooting, licking, and a foul smell could indicate a problem with the anal glands. Sometimes under stress, your pet may empty his or her anal sacs – this is especially true in the cat. Anal sac problems are common in small dogs. Cats will occasionally empty their anal sacs but they have problems with them much less frequently than dogs. Remember, it is normal for the anal sacs to empty from time to time. The best way to clean your dog or cat after this occurs is to use a baby wipe.

### What disorders can occur in the anal sacs?

- **Anal Sacculitis** is an infection of the anal sac – usually the culprit is yeast or bacteria. Your veterinarian may send the contents to a diagnostic lab to culture the bacteria and determine the best type of antibiotic for treatment. Sometimes flushing the sacs thoroughly under sedation or anesthesia and instilling them with an antifungal or antibacterial medication can help your pet. If the infection does not have a place to drain, it can lead to an anal sac abscess. If your pet seems to get recurrent anal sac infection, there could be another underlying cause such as allergic disease.
- **Anal Sac Abscess** is a condition where an infection has occurred and was not able to drain from the normal opening of the anal sac in the rectum, likely because of a blockage or impaction. Usually, your pet will need to have both glands flushed using a special catheter under anesthesia lest the infection return quickly. Your pet will likely also need a course of antibiotics, pain medication, and regular warm compress therapy at home.
- **Anal Sac Impaction** is a condition where the anal sacs cannot empty on their own. Your veterinarian may need to manually express the glands via a rectal examination and may recommend flushing the glands as well with sterile saline solution and a special catheter.
- **Anal Sac (Cancer)** can happen to any dog, but older female dogs are at highest risk. It is very important that your veterinarian perform a rectal examination in your older pet on a regular basis to screen for this type of cancer. We recommend twice per year visits for all dogs over seven years of age.

### What can I do to help my dog with anal sac disease or problems?

It is important that your veterinarian examine your dog for this condition and possibly perform some additional tests on your dog's anal secretions. If your dog has other skin problems, the underlying cause of these problems should be addressed. Many dogs with allergies to food or environmental allergens (pollens, grasses, dust mites) also have anal sac problems.

Some dogs have over-active anal glands and may get relief from regular expression of the anal sacs to reduce the buildup of pressure. If your dog is a candidate, we can show you how to do this externally.

Some dogs whose anal sacs fill frequently may benefit from having them flushed well under sedation or anesthesia followed by instillation of an antifungal or antibacterial ointment. Rarely a pet may allow this while they are awake.

Changing your pet's diet to increase the bulk of the stool may help the sacs express normally during defecation. As owners and pet food companies have strived for smaller stool volumes (less for owners to pick up), there has been an increase in problems with the anal sacs. A diet high in fiber can range from a prescription diet high in insoluble fiber such as *Hill's r/d or w/d diet*, to a premium light formula, or to the addition of one teaspoon of high fiber breakfast cereal (Fiber One or All-Bran) per 10 pounds of body weight.

### If my dog or cat does not really need the anal sacs, can they be removed?

Surgical removal is certainly an option. We recommend surgical removal especially for dogs that have had two or more anal sac abscesses. As this surgery carries the risk of anal incontinence, we recommend that it is performed by a board certified specialist surgeon.