



McMASTER & HEAP
VETERINARY PRACTICE

LET'S "BOOT" the "SCOOT"

Impacted, infected, inflamed, foul smelling **Anal Glands**. A slightly weird topic to write about but becoming a very common complaint in many dogs and even cats. This week alone I have removed anal sacs bilaterally in 2 dogs and 1 cat.

Why do cats and dogs have them? They are purely scent making glands, situated between the layers of muscle that make up the rectum. When all is working right they are naturally expressed each time your pet poops! This is another way a pet can mark their territory, leaving a smell signal, therefore an important part of dog to dog communication.

These glands are still not fully understood. Why some dogs never need them expressed and some dogs and owners are miserable because of these glands, sparks some debate...

Clinically, cats scoot less often than dogs and are more likely to develop traumatic hair loss of the tail base or caudal abdomen. Other signs seen in cats and dogs may include licking/biting at the anal, perianal, and/or tail region; matting of perianal hair; reluctance to sit; reluctance to defecate; straining; constipation; anal discharge; redness and swelling of anal area, vocalising, lethargy and a terrible foul smell.

The most common anal gland problems are:

1. Impaction - the anal sacs fail to empty, resulting in thicker secretions, that cause swelling and pain in the anal sacs
2. Sacculitis- this is inflammation or infection within the anal sac which can lead to an abscess or fistula.
3. Hypersecretion whereby dogs express their anal glands often often due to a fright or anxiety.
4. An abscessed anal sac
5. Benign or malignant tumours associated with the anal sacs

What increases your dogs chances of anal gland issues:

1. Chronic skin infections with bacteria or yeast
2. Skin mite infestation
3. Food allergies
4. Hypothyroidism
5. Obesity
6. Environmental allergies (Atopy)
7. Diarrhoea and Inflammatory Bowel disease
8. Frequent anal gland expressions, which may happen at groomers. This can cause inflammation of the anal gland, scarring and narrowing of the anal gland duct.



Dani and Chase enjoying a walk

Typically I will squeeze the glands and assess the size and shape and material extruded. If I think allergies (either food or environmental) are a contributing factor, I discuss hypoallergenic diets, fiber added, fish oils as a natural skin anti-inflammatory and possible a steroid trial. Antibiotics is usually only prescribed if there is blood in the secretion or the sac has abscessed.

Sometimes with abscessed anal glands I will recommend flushing and packing the anal sacs with antibiotic lotion under sedative. This can be effective at controlling an abscessed gland and requires no further treatment.

If the anal gland disease is long standing and persistent and causing the patient discomfort, I will recommend bilateral anal sacculotomy. When done correctly, this procedure is highly effective with very few complications. A good discussion needs to be had with the owner so they are clear of possible complications. In the "end" this procedure is often the only way to completely resolve the problem and give a patient its quality of life back.

Chase, a 3 year old Beagle, owned by one of our vet nurses and her partner, was presented for anal gland removal as he was constantly getting his glands go in their home. The anal sacs were not abscessed nor impacted but its very hard to live with the smell of anal glands on your furniture, carpet or bedding. The surgery is delicate and care needs to be taken working around the anal area to ensure you don't damage any nerves risking the complication or fecal incontinence. Like with anything, the more you do the better you get at it and at the end of the day your dog can easily live without his glands, BUT can you live that smell.

Dr Michele McMaster



Chase eagerly awaiting his surgery with Michele.



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