



ANAL GLAND DISEASES

ABOUT THE DISEASE

The anal glands are two small glands located on either side of the rectum that produce a clear to yellow foul-smelling liquid. Normally when an animal defecates, this material is expressed onto the feces as it passes the rectum. Occasionally, animals may also discharge this odorous secretion spontaneously when they are startled or excited.

The most common **anal gland diseases** are:

- Impaction – failure of the gland to express, which can cause the gland contents to harden and cause discomfort
 - At times, the anal gland duct may also become plugged with hardened material.
 - Prolonged impaction can lead to rupture and development of an abscess.
- Abscess – bacterial infection of the gland, usually following an impaction or rupture
 - The abscess will cause significant inflammation around the anus and eventually rupture through the skin.
 - Pus and blood on the skin and hair coat around the anus is typically found in later stages.
- Tumor – some are benign, but most are malignant
 - Annual examination can help catch masses in their small, early stages, lessening severity of surgery.

Symptoms:

- Scooting behavior
- Attempting to lick the anus or under the tail frequently
- Pain while defecating, or even a reluctance to defecate
- Changes in stool appearance – may be flattened or small

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

Common symptoms along with a rectal examination performed by a veterinarian or veterinary technician is the best way to diagnose **anal gland diseases**.

TREATMENT

The simplest short-term solution is to have an internal anal gland expression by a veterinarian or a veterinary technician. Some grooming facilities will perform an external expression, but do not always completely expel the material.

At times, if anal gland expression is too difficult or painful due to **anal gland diseases**, sedation may be necessary to express the contents and inspect for other disease.

If an anal gland abscess is present, patients must always be sedated to flush the anal gland duct. This is achieved by introducing a small plastic catheter into the duct and irrigating with antiseptic solution. If the duct remains plugged, it will not allow proper excretion of material after the abscess heals which will increase the chances of recurrence.

Depending on the degree of inflammation or infection, patients are often placed on pain medications, anti-inflammatories, and sometimes antibiotics.

If the anal glands require frequent expression, or become impacted or abscessed, a common long-term solution is for the patient to undergo a dietary change. This often means that patients will need to have all people foods, soft treats, fatty chew treats (raw hides, etc.) and certain types of canned foods completely excluded from their diet. Some patients may have food allergies contributing to **anal gland diseases** and require a unique ingredient (duck, potato, venison, etc.) or hypoallergenic diet.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Generally, anal gland impaction or abscession is not a serious illness.
- Frequent anal gland expressions are easy short-term solutions.
- Exclusion of people foods and fatty treats will help with long-term management.
- Anal gland tumors are best treated if caught early, so be sure to request expressions and evaluations annually.