

Anal Glands

What are Anal Glands?

Anal glands, or anal sacs to give them their correct name, are paired sacs found either side of the anus in dogs and cats. These glands secrete a pungent smelling oily brown coloured liquid that is usually squeezed out unnoticed when a dog defecates. There are theories that anal glands are used for scent marking and dogs can express their anal glands when frightened, however, it is not entirely known why dogs and cats have anal glands. It is not common for cats to have issues with anal glands, hence this article will focus on dogs. It is not uncommon for dogs to experience a problem at some time in their lives. If the liquid builds up within the glands and cannot empty, it can cause a gland to become impacted, inflamed or infected, it can also abscess and burst.

Symptoms of anal gland issues

- Scooting – owners often think that this is a sign of worms but it is most likely that a dog has an itch or if persistent, an irritation caused by their anal glands
- Detection of a pungent smell – a little of the anal gland liquid may leak out causing an unpleasant odour.
- Persistent licking around the anus or biting around the base of the tail
- Some dogs may chew a foot or occasionally scratch an ear



Treatment

If the anal gland is impacted preventing the liquid from escaping, a vet will need to empty the gland manually. A short course of antibiotics may be required if they are infected or an abscess has formed. Some dogs will need their anal glands emptied regularly, some may have an intermittent need to have them expressed. There will be some dogs that will become irritated with the slightest issue with their anal glands and owners of these dogs will need to act more quickly to prevent them from becoming distressed. For some dogs, a vet may advise that anal gland removal should be considered.

Can a higher fibre diet help?

Once the anal glands are impacted and sore they will need to be manually emptied by a vet. Once the anal glands are empty, increasing the fibre content of food may help some dogs and feeding with the aim to 'bulk' the faeces in dogs with persistently soft stools may be of benefit. A slightly firm and bulky stool may help express the anal gland when a dog defecates.

