



Corinne McGregor, DVM **Southwoods Animal Hospital**

Dr. Corinne McGregor grew up on a small horse farm in northeast Indiana. She completed her undergraduate degrees at the University of Findlay in Ohio, and graduated from The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine in 2004. She has been with Southwoods Animal Hospital for 11 years, and recently became an owner of the practice. In her free time she enjoys cooking, reading, hiking, and spending time with her husband and

two daughters. She currently is allowed to co-habitate with one very sassy cat named Mia, and a needy Maltese mix named Finley.

What's Up With My Dog's Bottom?

It never fails... you have company over for a nice dinner and Fido decides to start scooting his rear end across the carpet. Or you're almost asleep and Fluffy starts loudly slurping away at her bum. What does it mean when dogs (or cats) are doing these disgusting habits?

Well, the most common cause is a problem with the anal glands. Anal glands are actually two sacs that lie under the skin, one on each side of the anus, at the 4:00 and 8:00 positions. Inside, the sacs are lined with gland cells that produce a stinky, oily substance which acts as a scent marker. The fluid exits through a tiny duct that opens at the anus, and is normally expressed when a dog passes a bowel movement. It's also the reason dogs sniff each other's rear end to get to know one another.

Anal gland problems can occur for numerous reasons, all of which result in build-up of anal gland fluid. Chronic diarrhea or constipation, obstruction of the duct, and obesity can all cause reduced ability to empty the glands. Excessive gland secretion can be caused by allergies, hormone imbalance, or skin infections, and will cause the glands to fill up quickly.

When glands become distended with anal gland material the glands become uncomfortable, and the pet licks or scoots to try to relieve the itching and pain. Anal Sacculitis means inflammation of the sac. The fluid can be expressed at this stage, but it may be painful when the gland is squeezed and sometimes the fluid is bloody or has pus in it. The glands need to be expressed, or emptied of the fluid. Since your pet is uncomfortable this is best done at the vet's office.

Your pet may need antibiotics and pain medications to relieve the discomfort and prevent worsening of the problem. The glands may refill quickly, so your vet may ask that you return in a week or so to empty the glands again and make sure the problem is clearing up.



Impaction occurs when the gland doesn't express normally and the fluid becomes so thick and dry that it can't squeeze through the duct. If the problem is diagnosed at this stage, your vet will attempt to express the glands. If they cannot be emptied your pet may need to be sedated to allow the glands to be flushed with antiseptic to relieve the impaction. The gland may be infused with antibiotics, and your dog will be placed on oral medications as well. If it continues to build up, the anal sac can become so infected and inflamed that it becomes an Anal Sac Abscess which is a hard, swollen, painful lump on the pet's rear end. A surgical opening may then be required to allow drainage. If not treated, the abscessed gland will rupture and drain to the outside. This is a Ruptured Anal Sac and is quite painful. Most clients notice the pet is bleeding from its rear end, but closer inspection reveals the blood is actually coming from a hole in the skin next to the anus. These are typically treated by flushing the wound with antiseptic and infusing medication inside, then starting oral antibiotics and pain medications. Frequent monitoring may be needed if the abscess is large, and occasionally surgical excision of the infected tissue is required.

Most dogs never have a problem with their anal glands, but those that do can have frequent, painful bouts of sacculitis or abscesses. Depending on the underlying cause, some dogs will respond to dietary changes. A high fiber diet or fiber supplement will "bulk up" the stools to help the glands express naturally. If allergies are an issue, then a hypoallergenic diet may be the best choice. Controlling an underlying allergy with medication or desensitization therapy may also be necessary. Having the glands expressed regularly to prevent build-up may work for some dogs. Owners can learn to do this at home, but it's definitely a 2-person job, and most owners don't want to deal with the stink! Besides, if the pet has developed an infection it may be painful and he may not appreciate your efforts. It's often best to let the vet be the "bad guy."

Chronic anal gland disease that hasn't responded to medical therapy can be treated by surgical removal of the glands. While this is a permanent solution, there are some very important side effects to be aware of. The gland tissue is very thin, and if not completely removed the remaining gland tissue will continue to produce fluid, which will build up and create a draining tract. Also, the glands lie within the muscles of the anus which keep it tightly closed. If damage occurs to the muscles or nerves during surgery the pet may experience permanent fecal incontinence.

Scooting and licking can be signs of other diseases as well. Any type of skin irritation, such as allergies, fleas or other parasites can cause itchiness. Swelling or bumps around the anal area can be due to cancers of the anal glands or perianal tissues, or perineal hernias. Bleeding or discharge from the skin may be caused by skin infections or Perianal Fistulas – a disease most common in German Shepherds. So, if your dog is showing any of these symptoms, it's best to see the vet to diagnose the problem and select the proper treatments. And, don't think that anal gland problems are only for dogs – cats can have many of the same issues!



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