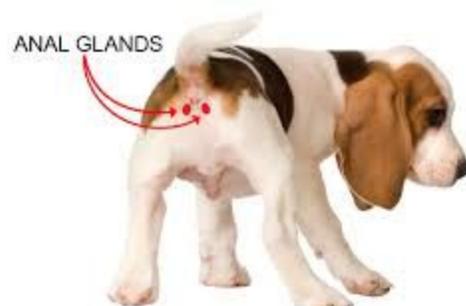


The Other End of the Story – Anal Glands

What, where, why...the yucky stuff!

Anal glands are two small scent glands, located under the skin on either side of the rectum. They can reach the size of small grapes when full of secretion, and are connected to the mucosal edge of the rectum by two small ducts. They are designed to empty their secretion onto the animal's bowel motions, being stimulated to contract by the stretching of the anal sphincter muscle when stools are passed. If your dog has never had a problem with them, you are unlikely to know they even exist. In the canine world, dogs mark out their territorial boundaries using their urine (which is also scented), and faeces. The unique scent produced by each dog's anal glands sends out a clear message as to "who's turf you are on". The scent produced by the animal's anal gland is totally unique to that animal, (as unique as a human's fingerprint) and acts as an identifier to other dogs. Given that a dog's sense of smell is over 10,000 times greater than a human's, it makes sense that such a strong smell to us humans (if you are familiar with the "potent" smell of anal gland secretion) must be incredibly powerful to a dog. This is also the reason why when unfamiliar dogs meet, they always indulge in session of tail lifting and bottom sniffing...the canine equivalent of a handshake and formal introduction.



So what goes wrong?



Anal gland blockage, or infection, is a common problem in domestic dogs, and occasionally in cats. The classic signs of anal gland problems in dogs, is "scooting". Scooting is the term used to describe a dog when it drags its bottom along the ground. This is commonly mistaken as a sign of worms (tapeworm infestation can occasionally cause scooting), but is far more likely to be anal gland irritation. Dogs will also lick and chew at the base of their tail, or around the general area of the rectum, in an attempt to relieve the irritation. If an anal gland becomes blocked, the secretion continues to build up in the gland, causing it to swell, and become painful. If it remains blocked for a long enough period of time, it will become infected, and can continue on to burst, and form an anal gland abscess.

What happens then?

Recurring anal gland blockage is also increasingly common. As a general rule, it is relatively easy for you vet to diagnose, and may often be noticed during a routine check up or vaccination. Expressing, or unblocking, the gland(s) is an unpleasant job, for both dog, owner, and veterinarian. It is achieved by physically squeezing the glands, either externally, or per

rectum, and manually removing the secretion build up. It can be quite painful for the dog, if the glands are very blocked, or infected. And the smell...aaaagh !!it doesn't get much worse! Once the glands have been expressed, the signs of irritation will usually disappear quickly, unless they are already infected. But it is unfortunately common that they can be blocked and full again within months. If infection has occurred, there can be permanent changes and scarring of the gland and ducts, that can prevent normal emptying. These dogs end up with chronic anal gland problems, and can be regular visitors to the vet clinic.

So what is the answer ?



Like most diseases, prevention is better than cure. The key to correcting anal gland dysfunction, is to understand what is going wrong. The principle cause of dysfunction is improper emptying of the glands. It is a lack of stimulation to the glands, to fully empty. This, quite simply, is caused by a lack of faecal bulk. Without correct faecal bulk, the anal sphincter muscle is not stretched, and the glands are not forced to empty. This lack of faecal bulk has been caused by two major changes to the average domestic dog's lifestyle.

Firstly, the confinement of modern dogs, to the average back yard, has significantly reduced the normal roaming and scavenging habits of dog's. A wild dog will eat an incredible range of indigestible material every day, including bark, wood, vegetation, clay and soil, feathers and fur, bones...etc. A vast amount of this material is passed by the dog in its daily faeces. The resultant faecal



motions are large and firm, and cause full stretching of the anal sphincter, and complete anal gland emptying. The second major change to modern dog's has been the introduction of commercial pet foods. These processed diets are extremely low in residual faecal bulk and consistency. In fact, many premium dog foods are designed specifically to reduce faecal volume...how convenient. But at what price? So the simplest answer to correcting anal gland dysfunction is to replace faecal bulk. Raw bones provide an excellent natural source of faecal

bulking. The digestion of raw bones produces those characteristic hard "white" dog motions you often see. If you feed bones every other day, your dogs are extremely unlikely to get anal gland problems. The other very simple form of faecal bulk I use, is whole grain oats, a key ingredient in Vets All Natural Complete Mix. Whole oats are indigestible, and will pass through a dog's digestive tract and appear in the faeces intact. Adding Complete Mix, soaked in water per instructions, will create good firm stools at the other end. The end result will be normal functioning anal glands.

<http://www.vetsallnatural.com.au/anal-gland-problems/>