

Anal Sac (Gland) Disease



What is anal sac disease?

Both dogs and cats have two glands located just inside the anal opening at the 4:00 and 8:00 positions called anal sacs, or anal glands. These are normal glands that produce fluid with an unpleasant odor used for marking territory. In normal occurrences, these fluids are emptied through the gland ducts when your pet defecates. These sacs can become impacted, meaning the gland cannot be emptied due to the duct being blocked, which can lead to inflammation and infection, or even a ruptured gland. Infection tends to occur after an impacted anal gland has become so severely swollen and infected from bacterial overgrowth that the anal sac forms an abscess and eventually ruptures.

How will I know if my pet has anal sac disease?

Full anal sacs may cause irritation so pets may scoot, lick or chew around the anal area. You may also notice a foul odor, or your pet may be reluctant to sit or defecate.

What causes anal sac disease?

The exact cause is not known and any dog or cat can be affected. Smaller dog breeds such as chihuahuas, dachshunds, and miniature or toy poodles are more commonly affected than larger breeds. Anatomic structure may play an important role in the tendency to develop anal sac disease or abscesses; for example, smaller ducts decrease effective emptying. Other contributing factors may include thick or excessive anal gland fluid production, soft feces or diarrhea, poor sphincter muscle tone or obesity. Excessive anal gland fluid production may be due to a food allergy, endocrine (hormone gland) imbalance, or infectious skin conditions.

How will the doctor diagnose anal sac disease?

Diagnosis is typically based on symptoms and a physical examination, including a rectal exam. A fecal examination may also be necessary. Often times when the anal sacs become irritated, inflamed or impacted, they are painful and not able to be emptied easily, making it impossible to express the material from the anal sac while your pet is awake. Therefore, your pet may require sedation or anesthesia in order for the doctor to perform a thorough examination and/or treatment.

How will the doctor treat anal sac disease?

Treatment can vary with the type and severity of the disease. Infected or inflamed glands will most likely require antibiotics and possibly anti-inflammatory medication after the glands have been emptied. Abscesses may need surgical drainage and wound care at home. Sacs that cause recurrent problems or become cancerous may need to be surgically removed. If your pet has chronic anal sac problems, they may need to have the sacs emptied on a regular basis. Having the sacs emptied by your veterinarian or veterinary technician will help relieve the discomfort when the sacs are full.

Can anal sac disease be prevented?

Although the cause of anal sac disease is unknown, there are a few things that you can do to lower your pet's chance of developing this disease.

- Regular examinations of your pet with your veterinarian
- Frequent anal sac expression
- Maintain a healthy weight for your pet
- Consider a high fiber diet, especially for obese pets

If you are concerned about your pet developing chronic anal sac problems, your Banfield veterinarian can work with you to create a specific treatment plan for your pet.

For additional information, please contact your Banfield medical team.

