

Emptying Your Dog's Anal Glands

courtesy of Animal Info Publications

What are anal glands?

Anal glands (also known as anal sacs) are two small glands that are located on the left and right sides of your dog's anus (at approximately 5 o'clock and 7 o'clock).



Most carnivores possess anal glands. The glands contain a foul smelling runny brown fluid that is used by your dog as a type of calling card - eg. dogs' use these scents to communicate with each other. When your dog defecates the pressure on the anal glands causes some of the liquid to be passed along with the faeces. When dogs sniff each other's butts they are investigating these scents. When a dog raises her or his tail high in response to another dog sniffing their butt they are opening their anal glands slightly to allow the other dog to smell their scent. This is a normal and important part of dog communication. Humans will not generally detect the smell of the anal glands when they are functioning normally.

Most dogs do not have problems with their anal glands and will empty them regularly while defecating. However soft faeces will not press against the glands firmly enough to express the contents and this can cause the fluid to build up. This in turn can lead to an infection which can become quite painful. If left untreated it can turn into an abscess which will require medical intervention.

What are the signs of an anal gland impaction?

- Your dog 'scoots' or drags its rear end across the floor
- It licks or chews at the rectal area
- You notice a foul smell or discharge from your dog's anus (normal anal gland secretions are generally not detected by us humans)
- Swollen and painful anal glands
- Blood or pus are found on your dogs faeces

If either of the last two signs are observed you should take your dog to the vet.

How do you empty anal glands?

There are two ways you can do this. I recommend you wear latex gloves for either method!

1. Place a warm and moist cloth over the anal glands and apply firm but gentle pressure. If the glands are impacted the fluid can become paste like and it may take a few minutes for it to soften and be expressed through the openings onto the cloth.
2. Lubricate your gloved index finger with some KY Jelly and gently insert the finger into the anus. You should be able to feel the anal gland as a small lump and apply gentle pressure between the index finger inside the anus and the thumb outside the anus to express the gland (have some tissues handy to collect the fluid). Repeat this procedure on the other side.

It may take several emptyings before the sacs are fully evacuated. If the procedure seems to be very painful for your dog or if you find any blood or pus in the secretions then you should see your vet.

How often is this necessary?

This will vary with each individual dog. If you notice your dog scooting or chewing at her backside then it is time to check her anal glands.

Is there an alternative?

Yes. Your vet, vet nurse/technician or dog groomer will be happy to perform this procedure on your dog if you are unable to do so. Another alternative that helps some dogs that are prone to impaction is to add more fibre to their diet. This produces a bulkier stool that helps empty the anal gland as it passes through. You should discuss dietary changes with your veterinarian to determine an appropriate additive and the amount.

You can also upgrade your dog's diet to a higher quality product as these foods should produce firmer stools. You should also ensure your dog is wormed regularly as tapeworm segments can block the opening of the anal glands causing an impaction.