Scooting in Dogs

Dogs are often presented to the veterinarian for “scooting”. In many cases the dog’s anal glands are found to be full or even impacted with thick, foul-smelling fluid. Manual expression on a regular basis can sometimes provide an acceptable way of managing anal gland disease. However, there are several other disease states for which scooting is a presenting complaint. In these cases, other therapies could possibly offer a long-term solution for the problem.

Some dogs are genetically predisposed to anal gland disease. Other dogs have conformational problems such as obesity or tail position that make them susceptible to problems. The anal glands are located just under the skin on either side of the anus at approximately the 9 o’clock and 3 o’clock positions. They connect to the anus by means of small ducts and are generally expressed with each bowel movement by the presence of stool in the rectum. When impacted, the normal secretions become thick and pasty and cannot be self-expressed. The persistance of anal gland disease proceeds to anal sacculitis (infection), abscess, and finally ruptures. Sacculitis is characterized by yellowish blood tinged fluid indicating bacterial infection. This infection progresses to abscessation, which is a closed pocket of inflammation within the anal gland that often affects the surrounding tissue to form a painful warm swelling. When an abscesse ruptures, a draining tract forms providing an opening for pus to exit through the skin.

Impacted anal glands can initially be treated by manual expression and by increasing fecal bulk. Adding 1 to 5 tablespoons of All-Bran or pumpkin pie filling, or 1 to 5 teaspoons of Metamucil to the diet can increase bulk. In addition, Hill’s Prescription Diet w/d can be fed exclusively. When impaction progresses to infection, the glands must be expressed and antibiotics administered. Abscessed anal glands must be surgically lanced or hot-packed to cause the abscess to rupture. Ruptured anal glands are treated with oral (and sometimes topical) antibiotics and continued hot-packing to ensure that the infection continues to drain. Once the infection has cleared, surgical removal of all glandular tissue may provide a long-term solution to recurrent anal gland disease.

In some cases, dogs continue to scoot even after anal glands are removed. This indicates that other diseases must be considered and ruled-out to provide relief for the patient. These include food allergy, flea allergy, and inhalant allergies; yeast infection of the skin around the anus; irritation from fecal contamination of the skin; enflamed structures in the colon and rectum; and the expulsion of tapeworm segments. Your veterinarian may recommend a hypoallergenic food trial, allergy testing, and scrapings or swabs for microscopic evaluation. In short, problematic anal glands can be due to a

variety of disease processes. It's worth the time and effort required to figure out what the problem is and fix it definitively. There's no doubt your pet will thank you!

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