



Oak Bay Animal Hospital

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ANAL SAC DISEASE

The anal sacs are located on either side of the anus at the 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock positions; they are positioned just under the skin. They connect to the anus by means of small canal or ducts. Anal sacs produce and store a liquid, foul-smelling fluid. These are the same glands that a skunk uses to repel its enemies. Dogs and cats anal sac liquid drips out onto the stool, giving each a distinct odor that helps mark territory.

What diseases occur in the anal sacs?

There are three diseases that occur in the anal sacs.

1. When the fluid becomes thick and solidified, the condition is called **impaction**.
2. When bacteria grow in this material producing a yellow or bloody pus, the condition is called **infection**.
3. When the infection builds to create a hot, tender swelling in the gland, the condition is called an **abscess**. When the abscessed material becomes obstructed, the skin over the sac breaks open, and pus and blood drain onto the skin.

What are the clinical signs?

Symptoms of anal sac disease are:

1. Scooting or dragging the anal area
2. Excessive licking under the tail
3. Biting motions towards the back end
4. Pain, sometimes severe, near the tail or anus
5. A swollen area on either side of the anus
6. Bloody or sticky drainage on either side of the anus

How are these diseases treated?

The treatment for **impaction** is to express the sacs and clean out the solidified material. For **infection**, the sacs must be expressed and antibiotics administered to kill the bacteria. If the sacs **abscess**, the abscess must be surgically drained and antibiotics administered.

How likely is it for anal sac disease to occur again?

It is common for dogs to have recurrent anal sac disease. The anal sacs of some pets do not drain well, thus these animals are predisposed to problems. If several episodes of anal sac disease occur, the anal sacs can be removed surgically. It is the only way to permanently cure the problem.

Are there any common surgical complications?

Surgery requires general anesthesia. A small degree of risk is inherent in all anesthesia. However, modern injectable and inhalant anesthetics make this risk minimal for otherwise healthy patients.