

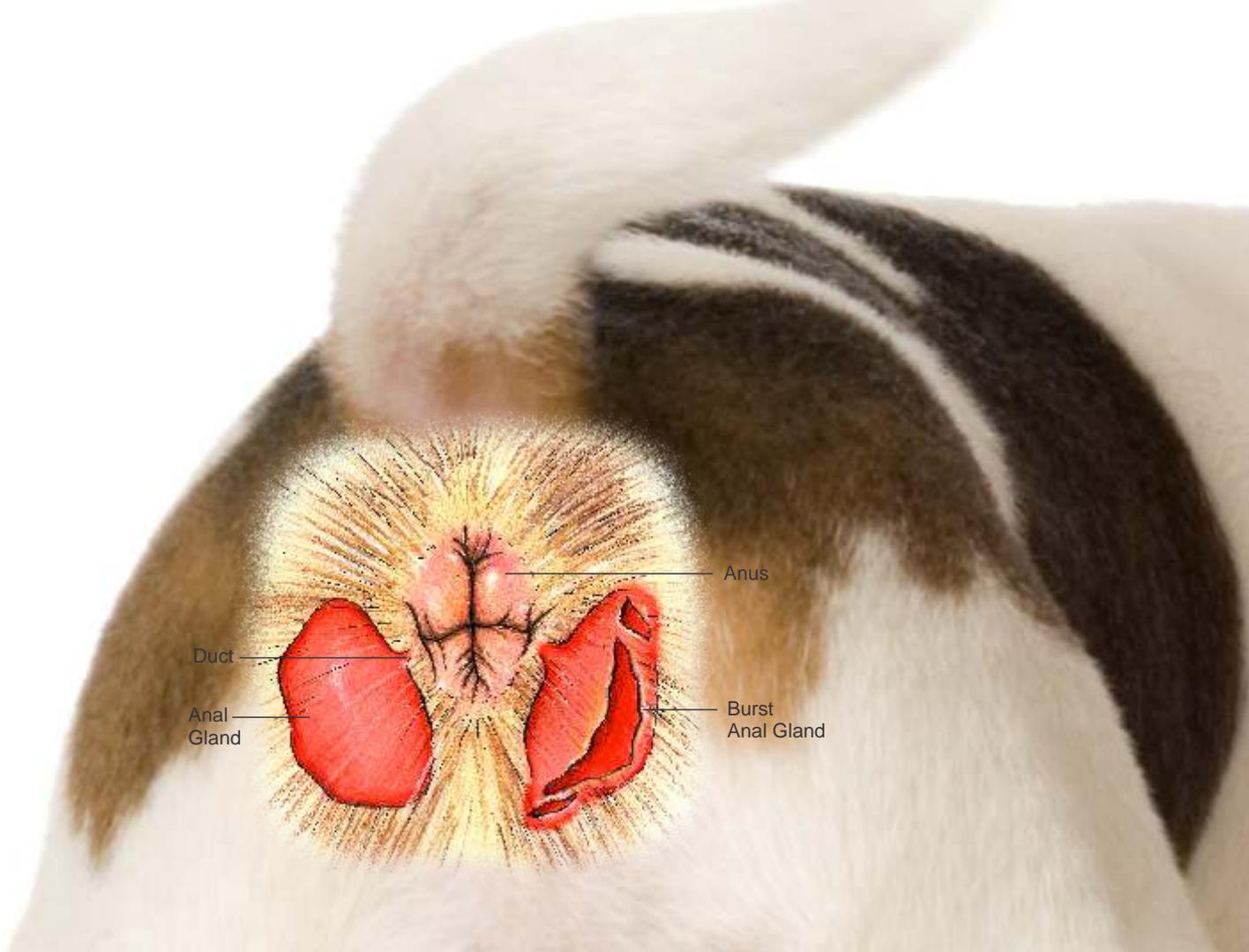
Anal Glands



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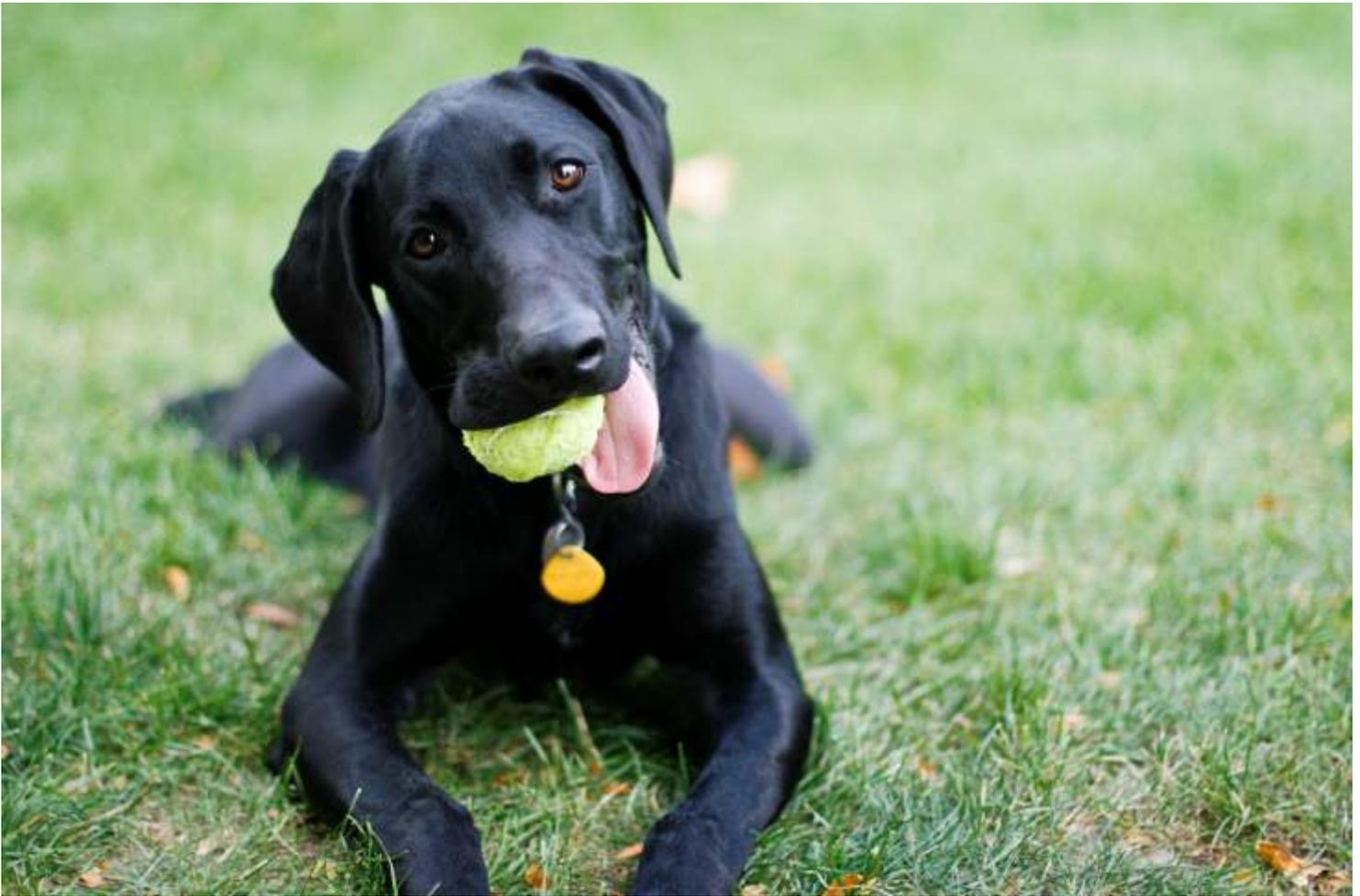
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What are anal glands?

Anal glands are sacs positioned at the equivalent of 4 o'clock and 8 o'clock either side of the anus. They secrete a fluid that serves as a scent marker to other animals when the animal defecates. They can also be emptied when the dog is frightened or under stress.

The glands have a glandular lining that is continuously secreting the anal gland secretions via a duct running from the gland to the internal ring of the anus. If the faecal motions are of normal size and relatively firm in consistency, the glands are continuously expressed and do not become a problem.



WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

When the stool is soft or runny, there is not enough pressure on the glands for them to empty. This leads to the anal glands becoming blocked or impacted. Even a short bout of gastrointestinal disorders such as has diarrhoea can lead to problems. It is commonly seen in small breed dogs but can occur in any breed. It can also affect cats but is not as common.

How do I know if my dog has an anal gland problem?

The classic tell tale sign is 'scooting' which is when they rub and scrape their bottom across the ground. You will see the hind legs under the backside and through the front legs. The dog will drag itself forward or in circles with its bottom scraping along the carpet, grass or ground.

You may also notice your dog constantly turning around to lick at the peri anal area or an awful smell suddenly occurring after excitement or stress. Brown liquid type discharge may also appear around the anus and the anal area may be swollen.

The behaviour of your pet may also change. They may suddenly get up and run to another area and sit down, and they may repeat this behaviour.



EXAMINATION

We will examine around the anal area looking for inflammation, infection, itchiness, worms and pain. A digital rectal examination (finger in the bottom) will be done to establish if the anal glands are swollen or full. This can be painful in some dogs. If the glands are full, they are expressed by squeezing the thumb externally and the index finger rectally.

The material expressed is variable in consistency from a brown liquid to a grey toothpaste like material which is foul smelling! Expressing the glands gives instant relief to the dog, though they will occasionally continue to scoot for a few hours after anal gland expression. Anal gland problems can usually be resolved by being expressed but sometimes the problem is more severe.

Infection

Bacterial infection of the glands can cause the dog to have a localised abscess(pus) within the glands. Antibiotic treatment is usually required.

Burst glands

If an infection is chronic and the gland is obstructed, the gland often bursts out at the weakest point and this may be through the perineal muscle wall just below the anus, causing immense pain, further infection and inflammation.

Cancer

Occasionally cancers can occur in the anal gland area. These present as larger masses that despite expression of the glands, thickened scar tissue seems to remain. Expression is difficult and may be painful.

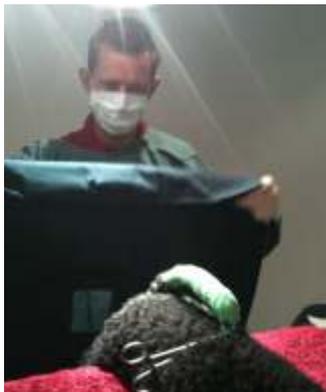


TREATMENT

Simply squeezing or expressing the anal glands will bring a welcome relief to the irritation of impacted anal glands. Many dogs will require this process be done only occasionally and others will need the glands frequently expressed. A veterinarian is the best person to do this, though some dog groomers will often squeeze the glands from the outside when a dog is bathed. The danger of a non veterinarian doing this is when excessive force is used or there is some medical condition that may cause a rupture.

Medication

In cases of infection, antibiotics may be prescribed and anti inflammatories in some instances. Some animals find the impacted gland painful and so the anti inflammatories will reduce both pain and inflammation.



Surgery

Masses found in the gland will need to be investigated. This can entail surgical removal of the suspect glands and laboratory histopathology to ensure the whole mass has been removed and to identify the type of mass.

What happens during surgery?

The gland is expressed and then filled with a wax like substance that hardens to allow the surgeon to palpate the exact location of each gland. The surgical process of anal gland removal involves two vertical skin incisions either side of the anus, over the glands. Careful dissection down to the gland, with ligation of blood vessels allows the access.



The gland is then shelled out delicately, ensuring that the muscular ring around the anus is not damaged. The anal gland duct is ligated and then the gland removed. A layer of dissolvable sutures is placed to close up the space left after removing the gland and then a skin suture layer is used to oppose the edges of the skin wound.



POST OPERATIVE CARE

The surgical wound will take 10 days to completely heal. You will need to come back to the practice 10 days following the procedure so the skin sutures can be removed. Post operative care may include antibiotics and anti inflammatories. An Elizabethan collar may also be required to stop your pet chewing at the suture site (pictured above).

PREVENTION

We will discuss with you some dietary changes as a diet adequate in fibre can reduce the incidence of anal gland problems. When passing a bulkier stool, the glands are naturally expressed. A consistent diet will also reduce gastrointestinal incidents like diarrhoea which may allow infection of the glands and stop them from being expressed naturally.



Feeding a premium diet like Royal Canin can help reduce the incidence of diarrhoea and inconsistently sized motions which will help reduce anal gland problems. One of our staff will help you choose the best diet for your pet.