

Why Does Your Dog Scoot?

If your dog has started dragging or scooting his bottom across your floor or outside on the grass, one of these three things may be going on that's causing him discomfort. Or worst-case-scenario, it can be an anal gland tumor.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Usually at least once in every dog parent's life, they notice their furry companion dragging or scooting his posterior across the carpet or grass
- This scooting behavior, more often than not, is triggered by itchy, irritated, inflamed, impacted and/or infected anal glands
- Three primary causes of anal gland problems are diet, trauma to the glands or the location of the glands
- It's important not to manually express healthy, functioning anal glands, whether you're a groomer, a veterinarian or a dog owner
- It's also important to identify the root cause of chronic anal gland issues rather than treating the symptoms only through repetitive manual expression

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Most dog parents are at least mildly horrified when their furry family member does the boot scootin' boogie across the carpet, an expensive area rug or some other fabric-covered surface.

If he's outside, he might do it on grass. And of course he only does it when you're entertaining guests in your home, or while you're chatting with a new neighbor in your front yard!

"Scooting," as it is lovingly called, signals an itchy or irritated backside. Rarely, the behavior is caused by tapeworms, in which case there are usually other symptoms such as weight loss, poor coat or skin condition, a distended or painful abdomen or diarrhea. You might also see worm segments near your dog's anus.

Scooting can signal another problem like a perianal tumor, or irritation caused by diarrhea or a perineal yeast infection, but most often the reason is an anal gland problem.

Your dog is dragging or scooting his bottom across the ground to try to relieve the itching and irritation caused by an inflamed, infected or impacted anal gland.

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Dogs' Anal Glands

Your dog's anal glands or sacs are small and oval-shaped, and sit just inside the rectum on either side of the anus at about the 8:00 and 4:00 o'clock positions. They're located within the muscle of the anal sphincter and the tiny opening to the ducts isn't easily visible along the anal mucosal junction.

The glands secrete a remarkably stinky, oily substance. This fluid may function as a territorial marker in the world of canine communication, allowing your dog to leave personal biochemical information for other dogs to investigate.

When your dog poops, if the stool is of normal consistency, this potent fluid is expelled out of the anal glands through tiny ducts and onto the feces. Anal glands empty with the pressure of the stool as it passes through the rectum and anus.

This is an efficient design of nature, but unfortunately, today's dogs often have loose stools or irregular bowel movements that don't press against the anal glands during evacuation.

Other contributors to anal gland problems can include obesity where there is insufficient muscle tone and excess fatty tissue, certain skin disorders and infections. But in my experience, there are three main causes of anal gland problems: diet, trauma to the glands or the position of the glands.

Problem No. 1: Your Dog's Diet

The grains in commercial pet food are allergenic and inflammatory. If your dog is experiencing recurrent anal gland issues, the first thing you should do is eliminate all grains from her diet. Stop feeding any food that contains corn, potato, oatmeal, wheat, rice or soy.

I also recommend switching to a novel protein for your dog. If, for example, she's been eating only beef and chicken, make a transition to bison or rabbit. A constant diet of just one or two types of protein can trigger an allergic inflammatory response.

Unaddressed food intolerances are a quite common cause of chronic anal sac issues.

If your dog's poop is frequently unformed, soft or watery, her anal sacs aren't getting the firm pressure they need to empty. Feeding a balanced, species-appropriate diet will address both food sensitivities and poor stool consistency.

Adding **probiotics**, fiber (finely ground pumpkin seeds or slippery elm powder) and digestive enzymes to her diet can also assist in creating consistently firm stools.

Problem No. 2: Trauma to Your Dog's Anal Glands

Many injuries to dogs' anal sacs are caused by well-meaning but misguided groomers, veterinarians and pet owners. Many groomers are in the habit of expressing the anal glands of every dog they groom, as a part of "included services," along with cleaning ears and trimming nails.

Routine expression of healthy anal glands is pointless, unpleasant for both dog and human and potentially harmful, so if you take your pet to a groomer, make sure to mention that no anal gland expression is necessary.

Over time, regular manhandling of these little sacs can interfere with their ability to function on their own.

Some veterinarians offer anal sac expression as an included service for pets who are being anesthetized for some other procedure. In addition, many veterinarians immediately express the anal glands if the owner mentions their dog scoots now and then.

This approach doesn't identify or address the cause of the problem, only the symptom.

And then there are dog parents who feel it's in their pet's best interest to express their anal sacs on a regular basis. Just as manually draining other glands in your pet's body is unthinkable, expressing healthy anal glands can create problems.

If your dog is having recurrent or chronic anal sac issues, it's important to identify the root cause rather than repetitively treating the symptom by manually expressing the glands.

The anal sacs are delicate little organs that can be easily injured through squeezing and pinching. They were meant to function optimally on their own without mechanical squeezing. Trauma to the glands causes tissue damage and inflammation, which in turn causes swelling.

Swollen glands can obstruct the exit duct through which the fluid is expressed. If blocked secretions build up and thicken in the glands, it can lead to impaction and anal gland infection.

Problem No. 3: Poorly Positioned Glands

Certain dogs have anal sacs that are located very deep inside their rectums. As stool collects in the colon, the pressure should cause the glands to empty. But if a dog's anal glands aren't adjacent to where the greatest amount of pressure builds in her large intestine, they won't express properly.

This is a situation that may require surgery to correct because the location of glands are genetically dictated.

Impactions, Infections, Abscesses and Tumors

When a dog's anal sacs malfunction, it's most commonly a problem of impaction. This occurs when the oily substance builds up in the glands and thickens, and isn't expressed, resulting in enlargement and irritation of the glands. Anal gland infections are usually bacterial in nature and cause irritation and inflammation. As the infection progresses, pus accumulates within the anal gland.

An anal gland abscess is the result of an unaddressed anal gland infection. The abscess will continue to grow in size until it eventually ruptures. My recommendation for these extreme cases is to infuse the anal glands with ozonated olive oil or silver sulfadiazine (diluted with colloidal silver).

Anal gland tumors, classified as adenocarcinomas, are usually malignant. Occasionally anal gland tumors cause elevations in blood calcium levels, which can result in significant organ damage, including kidney failure.

Getting to the Root of the Scooting

If your pet is having anal gland issues, your veterinarian should work to determine the cause of the problem rather than just treating it symptomatically by manually expressing the glands.

It's important to try to re-establish the tone and health of malfunctioning glands using a combination of dietary adjustments, homeopathic remedies and natural GI anti-inflammatories. Sometimes manually infusing the glands with natural lubricants or herbal preparations can help return them to normal function.

The goal should be to resolve the underlying cause and return your pet's anal glands to self-sufficiency. If your pet doesn't have anal gland issues I recommend telling both your groomer and your vet to leave these little glands completely alone to avoid future problems down the road.

Sources and References

[Capital Gazette July 5, 2016](#)
