

Points on Pets: Infected anal gland can cause no end of problems

by R.G. Elmore, D.V.M.

Q: My mother-in-law is convinced that our dog has worms and that our children are being exposed to worms because our dog occasionally scoots her rear end along the carpet. She - that is, our dog - also occasionally bites at her tail so vigorously that she nearly passes out. We have treated our dog for worms several times with medications that we bought at our pet store. I am pretty sure that our dog does not have worms. So what is causing the scooting and biting?

A: Many people believe that scooting and biting at the tail are signs of worms in dogs. However, usually this is not the case. Scooting and biting at the tail are more often signs of impacted or infected anal glands, also often called anal sacs. However, to be sure that your dog does not have intestinal worms, you should take a fresh stool sample to your veterinarian for examination.

Normal dogs have a pair of anal glands just inside their anal sphincters. Almost every time a dog defecates, a small amount of very bad-smelling fluid is excreted from these glands. This fluid normally coats the excreted feces. Some authorities believe that this strong-smelling material served as a territorial marker before dogs became domesticated.

Impaction or blockage of the anal gland ducts sometimes occurs in dogs on poor diets and in those who do not exercise adequately. Impacted anal glands contain very pasty or thick secretions. When left untreated, impacted anal glands usually become infected and eventually develop into abscesses, which cause pressure and pain. This leads to scooting and biting to relieve the pain. Occasionally, anal gland abscesses break open and release pus. This causes matting of the dog's hair coat under the tail.

Veterinarians empty the anal glands by applying manual pressure to them. Following emptying, many veterinarians infuse the glands with an oily ointment containing antibiotics designed to treat infections and prevent the development of abscesses. Veterinarians often recommend that the anal glands be surgically removed from dogs with chronic problems.

You should take your dog to your veterinarian for a complete physical examination as soon as possible. Your veterinarian can prescribe a complete wellness program for your particular dog. This will include prevention of internal parasites. A complete wellness program will help your dog have a long and happy life.

Q: We are pretty certain that our cat broke her tooth. Is this possible? Our cat, which is normally a very enthusiastic eater, has quit eating and will not allow us to look inside his mouth. Can a cracked or broken tooth be fixed?

A: You should take your cat to your veterinarian as soon as possible. There are lots of reasons why cats quit eating and will not open their mouths. After your veterinarian conducts a complete physical examination he can prescribe an appropriate treatment and give you advice regarding the care of your cat.

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