



Memorial-610 Hospital for Animals

910 Antoine Drive • Houston, Texas 77024

Telephone: (713) 688-0387 • FAX: (713) 682-6359

<http://www.mem610.com>

Anal Gland Disease in Cats

The anal glands 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 ducts. Anal glands produce and store a dark, foul-smelling fluid. Although cats use these for marking territories, many cats live in an environment that has no enemies. In these cases, the glands are rarely emptied, the fluid builds up, solidifies, and becomes an ideal environment in which bacteria can grow. Fortunately, anal gland disease is not very common in cats.

Anal Gland Disorders

There are 3 diseases that occur in the anal glands:

- 1) When the fluid becomes thick and solidified, the condition is called **impaction**.
- 2) When bacteria grow in this material producing 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 overflows the gland, the skin over the gland breaks open, and the pus drains onto the skin.

Clinical Signs

Symptoms of anal gland disease are:

- 1) Scooting or dragging the anal area.
- 2) Excessive licking under the tail.
- 3) Pain, sometimes severe, near the tail or anus.
- 4) A swollen area on either side of the anus.
- 5) Bloody or sticky drainage on either side of the anus.

Treatment

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

Treatment for Cats with Recurrent Disease

Anal gland disease can become a recurrent problem. For example, the anal glands of obese cats do not drain well, and thus these cats are predisposed to chronic impactions and infections. If a cat has several episodes of anal gland disease, the anal glands can be removed surgically. These glands serve no vital purpose, and their removal is the only way to permanently cure the problem.

Complications of the Surgery

Surgery requires general anesthesia that always carries some degree of risk, whether the patient is a cat or a person. However, modern anesthetics make this risk very minimal for cats that are otherwise healthy.

In rare cases, cats will experience lack of good bowel control after surgery. This occurs because the nerves that control the anus are very near the anal glands and may be damaged during surgery. However, this is almost always a temporary problem that will resolve itself in a few days to a couple of weeks.

Leaking Anal Glands

Some cats are born with anal gland ducts that do not close well. These cats are constantly draining anal gland fluid and leaving a foul-smelling drop wherever they have been. This is another indication for anal gland removal. There does not appear to be any other way to stop this, and these cats do not outgrow this problem.