

## Pure Dog Talk 510 – Tackling a Stinky Problem – Anal Glands

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**Laura Reeves:**

Welcome to Pure Dog Talk. I am your host, Laura Reeves. And, as I mentioned to you last month, Marty Greer is back and we are going to talk about everybody's favorite topic, anal glands. I know.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Oh, yeah.

**Laura Reeves:**

I know, it's nobody's favorite topic. I'm being facetious. But I'm saying it is an important part of our dog's health. Some breeds will encounter more problems with this particular area of their anatomy than others. And so, Marty is going to walk us through the whole thing. Welcome, Marty.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Thank you. Everyone's favorite topic.

**Laura Reeves:**

Everyone's favorite topic. So, let's start from the top. What are anal glands?

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Well, anal glands are two little glands or sacs that are next to the rectum. If your dog had numbers on their butt, they would be at four o'clock and eight o'clock. Fortunately, dogs don't come with numbers. But they're a little gland or little sac that sits right outside the rectum, and the duct to it opens into the rectum. And when the dog passes a stool, then it's normal for those anal glands to be naturally expressed during the passage of stool.

They're the same glands that are the scent glands in a skunk, the scent glands in a ferret. The ferret ones are, of course, removed if ferrets are going to become pets. And they serve as a communication function among animals. So, for instance, when the skunk is upset or angry, or being attacked, or whatever, they'll turn and lift their tail and their anal sacs will express, and that's a form of A, communication and B, defense. So, unfortunately, when our dogs get nervous...

**Laura Reeves:**

Scared.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Yeah. Sometimes they express their anal glands in the process of some of the procedures that happen or if things are not going well for the dogs.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

So, during an x-ray, if your dog is really nervous, they may empty their anal glands on the veterinary staff. Let me just say that veterinary staff knows all about anal glands and it is not popular.

**Laura Reeves:**

Pet groomers know it too, so do professional handlers.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Absolutely. Yes.

**Laura Reeves:**

Yeah. Everybody's been there. Anal glands in the face is something no one will ever forget.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

No, no. And you get it in your hair first thing in the morning, like you showered, your first appointment, you get it right in your hair, that's-

**Laura Reeves:**

Done for the day.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

You know what kind of a day you're having. Yeah. So, you go stick your head under the sink and wash your hair another time. The staff is usually laughing hysterically, because that is not the kind of mousse that one typically wants to put in one's hair at 8:00.

**Laura Reeves:**

No, or anytime.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Yeah. So, it ends up on your clothes. It's kind of a dark-brown material, when it's normal, either a light to a dark-brown material. Has a very distinct odor. Once you've smelled it, you will never forget the smell. It's going to stick with you. You get it on a dry clean-only jacket, yeah, it's-

**Laura Reeves:**

Burn it, just burn it.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

It's never good.

**Laura Reeves:**

Okay. I think that we're making light of this, but truly and honestly, this can be a very problematic area for many breeds. I mentioned to you just earlier when we were coming on air, my family started in Clumber Spaniels, and Clumber Spaniels are a breed that consistently has what is called impacted anal glands.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Right. So, there's just normal anal gland secretions. Then there are the impacted ones when the material gets thick and doesn't express normally then we can see them become infected. They can come in with a bloody discharge in the anal gland. We can see them abscess through the skin, where the dog comes in, clients don't really understand what happened. It looks like there's this opening of this hole next to the rectum.

**Laura Reeves:**

I'm raising my hand. I had a dog that had happened to. It is terrifying.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Yeah. It's really upsetting to clients because they don't know what happened, and it smells, and the dog is uncomfortable, and they're scooting, and it's just all the way around not a very great situation to have.

So, again, we can see a variety of things. Now, a lot of groomers will empty the anal glands at typical groomings, if you have a dog that gets groomed every six to eight weeks with the haircut and the nails, and all that stuff. But many groomers will express the anal glands just from the outside. They won't put a finger into the rectum because they feel like that's treading into veterinary territory. Understandably, they didn't go to vet school. They may not want to put a finger into the dog's anatomical body space. So, they may express them from the outside, but that may not be effective enough to manage some dogs' anal gland disease.

So, I see some dogs fairly regularly to have their anal glands expressed. At one point, my sister had two Borzoi and her idea was that I would teach her how to empty anal glands. And I'm like, "Okay, no problem." So, we were at her cottage. She had a little cottage in Wisconsin. And we went out on the deck because I said, "We're not going to do this in your cottage. That's a very small cottage. And once you've smelled it," like I said, "it's fairly characteristic. You do not want to make the cottage miserable for the rest of the weekend."

So, we went outside and I put on a glove and showed her how to do it. And then, she put on a glove and... Because please don't do this without gloves on. And so, I'm trying to teach her how to do it. And she's an attorney and it's a good thing, because her dexterity of her hands is not as good as it needed to be to empty anal glands. And her husband who is also an attorney, he comes out, he opens the door to the deck out on the cottage. And he takes one look outside, and he looks at her and he says, "Whatever they charge you, just pay them." And he went back inside. He's like, "It is not worth learning how to empty anal glands."

So, you may have people that are hands-on people, and they want to learn to do this. And I'm sure there are YouTube videos out there. I haven't actually looked. I'm sure there are. But in brief, what you basically do is you put a glove on your finger, you lubricate it with some Vaseline, and you put your index finger into the rectum, and you take your thumb and at about eight o'clock, you put some pressure on and you squeeze your thumb up toward the middle of your hand to express the material. And then you spin your hand, so that your thumb is now at four o'clock and you empty that anal sac as well.

And then you want to be prepared with a couple of paper towels. One I use as a shield. So, I have it in the hand that the finger is in the rectum, so that when it squirts out, it squirts into the paper towel, instead of all over my lab coat, all over my clothes, all over my hair, all over my face. And then the others are on the floor for where the anal gland material will drip down to. And then I have a spray bottle with an appropriate deodorizing kind of spray. I usually use chlorhexidine. It looks like Windex. So, I tell people I'm Windexing your dog's hiney. It's just like My Big Fat Greek Wedding with Windex.

So, you can pretty easily express them if you choose to learn how to do it. But for most people, this is best left to either the groomer or the veterinary professionals. A lot of veterinary technicians love doing anal glands so please don't deprive them, write them a check, let them do it for you. They look forward to this. This is a highlight of their day. So, like my brother-in-law said, "Just pay them".

**Laura Reeves:**

Just pay them. Okay. So, from the top, healthy anal glands don't need to be expressed because they are expressed when the dog has a stool.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Correct.

**Laura Reeves:**

So, what are going to be the causes, if you will, for when the anal glands are not being properly expressed and we need to give your veterinary technicians the joy of expressing them for the dog?

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Yeah. A lot of anal sac abscesses and anal sacculitis is associated with diarrhea. So, if the dog has had a loose stool, then some of the watery stool, instead of it passing the anal gland, will push down into the opening, set up housekeeping in that little gland and set up a bacterial infection.

So, most dogs will comfortably empty them on their own, but if they don't and they get an infection, then of course, we have to treat that with infusing the anal sac with some kind of a gel, like an ear medication is frequently used, like Panalog, and an oral antibiotic, and sometimes an oral pain medication.

There is a product, at least one on the market, that is marketed to improve the quality of the dog's ability to empty their anal sacs. I personally have not had clients have great success with it. I don't want to downgrade it. If it works for your dog, great, go for it. But most of the time, I don't think that it's all that useful. It's basically just increasing the fiber content of the dog's food so that their stool has a little bit more bulk to it and it's more likely to squeeze the anal glands on the way past.

Some dogs are just predisposed to this. Like you said, Clumber Spaniels, Bulldogs. They're just some breeds that don't effectively seem to be able to empty their own anal glands. And if you've ever seen your dog put their little rectum right on your carpet and put their back legs straight out in front of them and scoot, that's their effort to empty the anal glands, and it will leave a lovely brown smudge on your carpet that will have a tremendous odor. So, please discourage that behavior. And I've seen dogs even try to do it on the asphalt, and oh yeah, that's bad.

**Laura Reeves:**

Yeah. That's super bad.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Yeah. Asphalt's a little abrasive so try to avoid that kind of behavior. It's going to hurt the little dog's hiney.

**Laura Reeves:**

Yeah, hiney. Is there any truth to the urban legend, if you will, that it's overweight dogs, inactive dogs, couch dogs, that the more active and fit your dog is, the less liable that they are going to have problems with their anal glands.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Yeah, I think there's probably something to that, but there are just dogs that are predisposed to it. You know, my sister's Borzois were not.

**Laura Reeves:**

Right. When you said Borzoi, I was like, "Really?"

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Yeah, yeah. Now, the Bulldogs, yeah, I can probably make a case for that. But I just did surgery on a Great Dane. I've seen a couple of other doodle-type dogs that have had this. So, it's not exclusively just dogs that are older or inactive, or overweight. It can happen in any breed. And so, some of these dogs that they're having chronic problems, sometimes it can be related to diets, sometimes it can be related to perianal fistulas, but most of the time it stands alone as an anal sac issue. And so, I've talked to a lot of clients and said, "You know, we can remove the dog's anal glands." And they're like, "Say what? What? You can do that? That's a thing?" I'm like, "Oh, yeah. It is such a thing."

**Laura Reeves:**

In Clumber Spaniels, it is a very normal thing.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Yeah.

**Laura Reeves:**

Over the course of 30 years in Clumber Spaniels, I can think of very few that did not have their anal glands removed.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Yeah. And it's a relatively simple procedure. Most veterinarians should be able to accomplish it. Although, I will tell you that there's information online that says you have to be careful that the dog doesn't end up with fecal incontinence. But you'd have to be a fairly irresponsible surgeon to cause that degree of damage to the rectal mucosa and the muscles that go with it. So, basically, it's a skin incision about an inch long on each side of the rectum, again, at four o'clock and eight o'clock at a little bit of an angle, and you just basically dissect out the anal gland, suture back up, send the dog home.

The dogs have a pretty fast recovery. I usually put them on a stool softener for a few days just because the surgery around the rectum, we don't want them to be uncomfortable when they go to pass their first couple of stools and hold back until they do end up constipated. But just typically, a pain medication and some stool softener is all it takes to get these guys to recover. And if they are having chronic infections in the anal glands with blood and abscessing, and... It's just not worse.

**Laura Reeves:**

It's a much kinder solution.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Oh, yeah.

**Laura Reeves:**

The dog that I had that had abscessed his anal glands, it happened on the way home from the National. And it's blood and green, and gross, and on a white dog, on my Best in Show Clumber Spaniel. It was awful.

And when I was finally able to get him in for the surgery, the vet was shocked, literally. And he did many of our original Clumber's anal gland removals. It was like a four-cotton ball fill in the... Because the anal gland had been so badly damaged.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Right. But from a perspective of, "Does the dog need their anal glands?" Really, it's not necessary. It's a communication tool. So, when you see dogs greet each other, dogs that aren't familiar with one another, they go tails and nose, nose to tail, because they're sniffing each other's anal glands as a handshake, as an identification.

But really, it's only for social communication that the dogs need their anal glands. So, in today's society, they don't need to warn other dogs that there's a predator out there. They live on your couch. It's better off to not have them if you're having a dog that's having chronic problems. Now, that doesn't mean we take them out of most dogs. But if there's any chronicity to the problem, it's just better to get them out.

Now, I have an associate that's outstanding at infusing the anal gland. She'll take a tube of medication like you put in the ear, and she's like magical. She can get it down into that little gland and insert it, and get it done. Yeah, I'm not good at that. I just take them out, like just be done with it.

**Laura Reeves:**

Remove those puppies.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Yeah. Let's not just keep infusing this. So, yes, antibiotics and pain medication will help with one or two episodes of annual sacculitis. But if it's going on and on, just talk to your vet or talk to the vet's surgical referral place, and just get them taken out. It's not terribly expensive, and it's so much better.

**Laura Reeves:**

Much, much healthier for the dog. Absolutely.

Hang tight, guys. Got a little bit of information for you. We'll be right back to the podcast in a minute.

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**Laura Reeves:**

So, you mentioned a little bit earlier, we're going to do another one of these. We're on the entire system of the dog. We're at the anal glands, anal fissures. I mean, what kind of diseases are we going to run into in the rectal area of our dogs? I know everybody's favorite social media topic in any social media group is stud butt. I know. Odd, but there you go.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

True.

**Laura Reeves:**

So, let's talk about a few other doggy bottom areas.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Sure. So, there's a perianal adenoma, which we see most commonly in dogs that aren't neutered. Every now and then, we'll see it in a spayed female. But those are just benign growths around the rectum, that they're disturbing in that they can bleed and they can be a little bit messy, but they're not serious. They're a benign form of cancer. Neutering the dog can take care of it. There's some question as to whether drugs like finasteride that will manage the testosterone changes that dogs have as they age, if that'll help manage it. But again, not a serious problem. If the dog isn't neutered, they may recommend neutering. But if the dog is a valuable stud dog, it's not necessary.

Perianal fissures, those are nasty, frequently seen in German Shepherds, which are, of course, the tail tuckers. And then, we also see it occasionally in other breeds, I've seen it in German Shorthairs. I've seen it in Irish Setters. There's probably a component of food allergy to that. So, when we mange the food with something like a fish and potato diet, and on an appropriate antiinflammatory or immunosuppressive drug like cyclosporine, like Atopica, that can help manage these dogs pretty well. Those do not lend themselves well to a surgery. They tend to recur and recur, and recur. So, those are difficult to manage unless you get a really good handle on diet and cyclosporine, which gets to be pretty expensive.

Those are, really, the most common things that we see around the rectum. Every now and then, we'll see a puppy that has a little bit of a prolapsed tissue. Most of them are not enough tissue to be concerned about. It's usually not actually the large intestine. It's a little bulge of tissue. But we can certainly see in young dogs that have a heavy parasite load, a small prolapse. But again, not common in the adult dog.

And then the other rectal disorder that we see, again, not commonly, is a perineal hernia. And again, it's associated with a dog that isn't neutered. In most cases, male dogs that aren't neutered. And they will actually develop a hernia next to the rectum. They can have their large intestine slip into it. I've seen a bladder slip into it. Again, serious, it requires a very qualified surgeon to correct. It's very difficult to put that muscle tissue back together. They will recommend neutering the dog. And it does require a lot of skill because there isn't much tissue to put back together when the muscle fails around the rectum. It's like sewing together wet Kleenex. So, I usually send those to a surgeon that has a lot of experience with those.

But that's typically all we see around the rectum. Anal sacs are hands down... And I want to say sacs, S-A-C-S, not S-E-X. I have clients that say, "No, no, no. My dog would never do that." And I say, "They would not." But it's sometimes just a misnomer, a misunderstanding of what... If you're in Wisconsin and instead of saying sacs, you say sex.

**Laura Reeves:**

Glands. Glands are so much easier.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Glands is a safe word to use. So, we don't want to confuse anybody with what the actual physiology is back there.

**Laura Reeves:**

Correct.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

But anal gland issues are probably the most common. But even though they may look serious, they are not life-threatening. No dog ever died from one. They're just messy and it's something that you need to address with appropriate treatment.

**Laura Reeves:**

The infected ones can be a little sketchy, I have to say.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Yeah. They're not fun. But I've never seen a dog get desperately sick from one. It's just-

**Laura Reeves:**

Just gross.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

It's more of an inconvenience. And it's usually a Clavamox deficiency, and we can fix that.

**Laura Reeves:**

Clavamox deficiency.

**Laura Reeves:**

The only other thing that I would question you on, anal gland issues with regards to cold tail. For people in the show ring, that you see a dog that doesn't want to put its tail up, we think of it as cold tail. I have heard, again, this urban legend thing, and that I wanted to have you speak to, that cold tail could be caused by some complications in the anal glands.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

You know, we see cold tail fairly often in the summer in Wisconsin because a lot of dogs hit the water. I have seen it after baths after grooming. And I don't think we really understand cold tail or limber tail, or broken tail, or whatever you want to call it. There's a couple of terms for it. I don't think we understand it very well.

I think it's probably related to a pulled muscle on the underside of the tail because there's usually some swelling. If we lift the tail up, the dog is uncomfortable, and there's usually a bit of a swelling about two inches from the rectum on the underside of the tail that's pretty noticeable. I usually check anal sacs at those visits but, typically, they're not the source of the problem. And typically, those dogs will respond pretty well to an anti-inflammatory like Rimadyl and Metacam, one of the typical anti-inflammatory medications.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

But if the dog has recently had a bath... And I don't understand why a bath does it, but-

**Laura Reeves:**

As a professional handler, I can't tell you how many times I had it. And my favorite would be the Akitas, because the Akitas, for whatever reasons, going to be the Akitas that has to have its tail up in order to even walk in the ring, yeah, that would be the dog.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Right.

**Laura Reeves:**

Perfect.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

But I wish we understood it a little bit better. I don't think anybody has put a lot of research dollars into it, shall we say, because, it's-

**Laura Reeves:**

Also, not life threatening.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Yeah, exactly.

**Laura Reeves:**

Right.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

You put the dog on anti-inflammatories, they get better. Just be aware that you can see it happen and... I mean, I have Corgis. I don't have to worry about it. It's not a thing.

**Laura Reeves:**

Well, not all of us have a bobtail breed so some of us want to know why our tails aren't right. Oh, my gosh.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

There you go.

**Laura Reeves:**

Oh, my gosh. All right. Well, you guys, this is how we break in the New Year here at Pure Dog Talk, we have some conversations about anal glands. I feel like that's a pretty good day.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Got to love it.

**Laura Reeves:**

Got to love it. Welcome to 2022.

All right. Marty, thank you so much. As always, you bring joy to my life and our listeners appreciate it.



**Dr. Marty Greer:**

Well, if you're going to do it, you might as well have fun.

**Laura Reeves:**

Go big or go home, honey.

**Dr. Marty Greer:**

You got it.

**Laura Reeves:**

All right.

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As always, if you have any questions or input, we'd love to hear from you. The show notes and links to resources on today's topic are available at [puredogtalk.com](http://puredogtalk.com). Drop us a note in the comments or email to Laura at [puredogtalk.com](mailto:puredogtalk.com).

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That's all for today. Thank you for joining us on Pure Dog Talk.