

Annabelle is a four-year-old Yorkshire terrier who lives in very close proximity to her caretakers Lisa and Paul. She spends almost all her time in the house and is, according to Lisa, very smart and quite good and manipulating both she and Paul.

Over her first four years Annabelle has been the picture of health but over the last few months she has had a problem with scooting her bottom along the carpet. Lisa takes Annabelle to be groomed on a regular basis and has had her anal glands expressed regularly as well. Most recently this was done as Lisa thought there might be a problem with the glands. It has not seemed to help. Annabelle seems more uncomfortable than ever and Lisa and Paul are looking for a solution to her problem.

Certainly, a trip for Annabelle to her veterinarian is in order. The behavior described by Lisa as scooting the rear end along the ground indicates irritation around the rear end. There are many different causes possible for this irritation one of which is anal gland problems.

Anal glands are structures we have discussed here in the past. These glands are found just below the anus in dogs and cats and many other mammals. The most famous of these glands belong to the skunk but the substance found within them in any animal is no treat for the nose. Their purpose is thought to be one of marking territory as well as a repellent that is discharged in fearful situations. Over time in some dogs these glands can build up material that is not properly expressed and therefore leads to irritation and in worse cases, rupture. One of the most common symptoms of anal gland irritation is scooting the area along the ground.

As mentioned, there are other potential causes for scooting. Parasitic worms inside the intestinal tract can cause scooting. This is perhaps most common with tapeworms. Loose stool can stick to the area around the anus and become irritating, which leads to scooting. Masses growing near the anus or even inside can cause scooting. Annabelle's veterinarian should, without too much trouble, be able to determine the likely cause of her scooting.

If anal glands are the problem, they will need some special attention. Commonly, as has been done for Annabelle previously, anal glands are expressed at the grooming parlor. This procedure has a few different techniques used to accomplish this task, all with the desire to remove the material from the glands. Unfortunately, expression of the glands is never complete.

When the anal glands are expressed, there is always some material left behind and it is often thicker material. With repeated expressions over time, the material left behind begins to increase leaving the companion prone to discomfort. If this cycle continues, in some of these cases, the anal gland can rupture and become grossly infected.

The ideal method to prevent this is to not only express the glands but to then instill back in them a lubricating solution, which itself is then expressed along with the left over thicker material. This provides complete relief. If a dog has chronic problems with anal glands, there is a permanent solution.

The best way to eliminate anal sac problems is to have the glands removed. This is accomplished via surgery and completely eliminates the glands and the concomitant problems they cause in some companions. It provides a total cure which is always desirable.