

## Instructions to Express Anal Glands

Most dogs and cats express their anal glands, or more specifically their anal sacs, on their own when they're defecating. If you're noticing your pet scooting their butt multiple times per day, or if you're occasionally being bombarded with a rather foul odor coming from their bum, it's possible that your dog's anal sacs are full and could benefit from expression.

This step-by-step guide will help you learn how to express anal glands at home. Please consult with your veterinarian on whether your pet would benefit from at-home anal sac expression before routinely expressing your pet's anal glands on your own.

## Signs Your Dog Needs Their Anal Glands Expressed

The following is a list of signs indicating that your dog needs their anal glands expressed:

- Excessive butt-scooting (a few times a day or more than usual)
- A foul odor—sometimes described as fishy
- Excessive licking in the anal region
- Inflammation (redness and swelling) around the anus
- Straining when pooping

If your dog has inflammation in the area or is straining when pooping, take them to be examined by a veterinarian before attempting anal gland expression. Your vet can rule out other medical issues. If your dog has an infected or impacted anal sac, this should be managed by a veterinarian. Anal sac cancers also exist and may cause these symptoms—your veterinarian can rule this out for you.

## 8 Things You'll Need To Express a Dog's Anal Glands

- Disposable latex, nitrile, or similar gloves
- Paper towels
- Pet wipes safe for dog bottoms
- Deodorizing spray made for dog bottoms
- Treats to reward good behavior
- A towel to cover the floor or table
- Wet washcloth
- Petroleum jelly
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## How To Express Your Pet's Anal Glands at Home

Here's a step-by-step approach for how to express a dog or cat's anal glands at home:

1. For small dogs and cats, you'll want to position them on an elevated surface, such as a table, with a towel under them. For large dogs, you can do this on the floor with a towel beneath and behind them. We recommend that anal gland expression be done on a solid surface to make any necessary cleanup easier. You should have someone else hold your dog in place for the expression.

**We don't recommend expressing your dog's anal glands without another person present to assist.**

2. **Put on the disposable gloves.** You can put petroleum jelly on the thumb and pointer finger of your dominant hand, though this isn't completely necessary, as with this technique you will not be putting fingers or other instruments inside your dog's anus.

3. If your dog's tail is long enough to cover their anus, lift the tail in your non-dominant hand. Put a paper towel inside the palm of your dominant hand. Place your thumb about an inch from the anus on one side and your forefinger about an inch from the anus on the other side. The glands are slightly below the midline (4 o'clock and 8 o'clock), so your fingers will also need to be below the midline.

4. Gently but firmly pinch your forefinger and thumb together, applying slight upward pressure. We recommend having the paper towel in the palm of your hand pushed forward, to cover the anus in case the secretions come out with some trajectory. A smelly, brown to tan fluid should be released.

**The fluid can be thin or thick, but if the fluid is particularly chunky or you see blood, stop and consult with a veterinarian. If you can feel the glands but nothing will come out, stop and consult with a veterinarian. If your dog reacts painfully, stop and consult with a veterinarian!**

5. After you have emptied the anal sacs, clean your dog's behind with a wet washcloth. We recommend spraying the area with a bum-safe deodorizing spray and cleaning the area with pet-safe wipes.

6. Throw away any gloves and paper towels you have used. Washcloths and towels should go immediately into the laundry. Wipe down the surface your dog was on. Wash your hands.

7. Reward your dog for a job well done! They deserve some pretty fabulous treats.

Please note that if you have your pet's anal sacs expressed by the veterinarian, you may see the vet do one anal sac at a time by inserting a finger in your dog's anus. **This is a great technique for veterinary staff to use, but it should not be performed at home without the explicit instructions of a veterinarian.**

## Can Dogs Express Anal Glands on Their Own?

Most dogs express their anal glands on their own naturally when they defecate. Anal gland secretions likely serve the purpose of marking an animal's territory. A dog's anal sacs may also express if the dog is particularly scared or anxious. Most dogs don't need their anal sacs regularly expressed at home.

If your dog has inflammation in the area or is straining when pooping, take them to be examined by a veterinarian before attempting anal gland expression.

So why do dogs scoot their butt? Sometimes it's as simple as an itch that needs to be scratched. Other times, it might help the dog express their anal sacs, and, if so, you might notice a foul odor afterward. However, butt-scooting can also be a sign that manual dog anal gland expression is needed.

Some dogs have anal sacs that fill up rapidly, don't express well during defecation, and run the risk of infection or impaction if they aren't expressed. These are cases where it may be beneficial for a pet parent to intervene. Chat with your veterinarian to determine what makes sense for your pup.

## What Happens If a Dog's Anal Glands Aren't Expressed?

If a dog's anal glands aren't expressed, they can become impacted, blocked, or infected.

An impacted anal sac is full of thickened secretions. The anal sac enlarges and becomes painful. Impaction sometimes causes the duct to become blocked, which worsens the issue.

An infected anal gland usually fills with pus. The infected gland will be swollen and painful. Swelling sometimes leads to obstruction of the anal gland duct, again complicating the issue.

If the anal sac becomes too large, either due to impaction or infection (abscess), it can rupture, causing an open wound next to the dog's anus.

## When To Call the Vet

**We recommend calling your veterinarian if:**

- **The anal region is red and swollen.**
- **Your dog reacts painfully to anal gland expression.**
- **You note chunkiness, pus, or blood in the secretions.**
- **You can feel an enlarged anal sac but are not able to express it.**
- **You see an open wound next to your dog's anus.**
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If the above method is not working for you, speak with your veterinarian. In some cases, they may show you the internal method, which involves putting your finger in your dog's anus.

Before routinely expressing your dog's anal sacs, we recommend speaking with your veterinarian to determine if your pup may benefit from it. Overexpression of the anal sacs may result in irritation to the area.

## Does it hurt a dog to express their anal glands?

While it may not be comfortable, it should not cause your dog pain. A dog who reacts painfully to anal gland expression may have an impacted or infected anal sac. **Stop and speak with a veterinarian.**

## How can I tell that my dog's anal glands are full?

You can tell that your dog's anal glands are full if the dog is butt-scoting a lot, you're noticing a fishy odor, or they're licking their anus a lot. In some cases, you can feel the full anal sacs at the 4 o'clock and 8 o'clock positions around your dog's anus. Keep in mind that some other conditions, such as an anal tumor, could cause several of these signs. If this is new for your pup, it's best to have a veterinarian rule out other medical conditions first.

## Supplements

Sometimes allergies or your pet's individual conformation prevents them from easily expressing their anal glands on their own. Managing the allergies, having an overweight pet lose weight, or anal glands supplements such as Gland-X or Gland-ese can help calm inflammation to help with expressing. Sometimes with certain conformations nothing that you do will completely help your pet self-express their glands, so they will need to be routinely done to prevent further issues.