

Anal Gland Surgery for Your Dog?

Experience is key to successful surgery. Ask for a referral if your vet doesn't have a track record.

Jon Geller, DVM

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Q. Every two to three months, my 2-year-old male Shih Tzu has to go to the vet to get his anal glands expressed. I'm assuming he'll have to get this done for the rest of his life. I have heard of a procedure to remove the anal glands, thus eliminating the need for expression. I would like to know your opinion on this procedure and if it is beneficial or detrimental to the dog. A. Anal glands are located just below, and on either side of a dog's rectum. They secrete a foul-smelling liquid that adds a unique identifier to your dog's feces that allow other dogs to identify him. They are not necessary for good health and can become a source of annoyance and questionable hygiene, especially if a dog "scots" across your carpet, rubbing his or her rear end on your flooring. Some dogs have trouble emptying these glands, and must have them expressed on a regular basis. An alternative to having the glands expressed on a regular basis is to have them removed surgically. An anal saccullectomy is a fairly delicate surgery because the anatomic structures are very small. There is a risk of permanent incontinence if the muscles that control anal sphincter control are accidentally damaged. I would recommend the surgery, but make sure your veterinarian has a lot of experience with the procedure, and ask about the frequency of complications. It is reasonable to ask how many times they have performed the operation and to ask for a referral to someone who does the procedure more often if your veterinarian has not done it very often.

Best, Jon Geller, DVM

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