

The Dog Who Could Not Wag His Tail

Sad dog tail sometimes happens to dogs after contact with water.

Jon Geller, DVM

Posted: Tue May 3 00:00:00 PDT 2005

Q. My 4-year-old Corgi mix can no longer wag his tail. His hindquarters look twisted at times. He can still stand up on his back legs. Other than that, his behavior is normal. What could be wrong with him?

A. This is very sad, indeed: "The Dog Who Could Not Wag His Tail." It sounds like the title of a sad bedtime story, or a mournful canine country-and-western tune.

All kidding aside, and assuming your Corgi mix is not sad, there are a couple of possibilities.

Dogs that have been swimming, or recently had a bath, sometimes have an extremely painful tail the next day. This is especially common in hunting dogs, such as Labrador Retrievers and Coonhounds. It's known as Cold Water Tail, Limber Tail or, as I call it, Sad Dog Tail.

The muscles at the base of the tail become incredibly painful, and usually your dog will not allow anyone to even come near his tail, much less touch it. The treatment is anti-inflammatory pain medication, which your veterinarian can prescribe. (Never give your dog human medications; many are toxic to dogs.)

Another problem that can affect your dog's tail-wagging mechanism is impacted anal glands. These two glands secrete a foul-smelling, thick fluid that marks your dog's feces so it can mark its individual scent. Other dogs find this scent interesting, but you will not. One clue that your dog's anal glands are impacted is scooting behavior, in which the dog scoots across the carpet on its rear end. Very unappealing! Your veterinarian can express these glands, a malodorous procedure that will nonetheless give your dog instant relief.

Visit your veterinarian if the problem continues and see if either of these conditions are going on. In the meantime, I hope your friend gets his wagging machine working again.

Best, Jon Geller, DVM

- Get More Advice From Dr. Geller -