Anal sac tumours
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What are anal sac tumours?

The anal sacs are two small glands that sit either side of the anus (back passage) under the tail. They produce a strong-smelling secretion which is emptied onto the faeces (stools).

Tumours (growths) may develop from the lining cells of these glands. These tumours are relatively uncommon in dogs, representing approximately 2% of all skin tumours, and they are very rare in cats. Anal sac tumours tend to be malignant and invade into tissues outside of the anal sac, and they also have the potential to spread to other areas, including the lymph nodes ('lymph glands') under the spine and the lungs. Between 50 and 80% of dogs have evidence of tumour spread at the time of diagnosis, even though in some of these animals the primary (original) tumour is small (less than 1cm across).

Anal sac tumours may be suspected or identified in the following ways:

- The tumour may be noted as an incidental finding during a routine examination, especially when an internal rectal examination is performed
- A lump or mass close to the anus is noticed or can be felt, e.g. during grooming
- A mass close to the anus causes irritation or bleeding in this area
- A large mass close to the anus or enlargement of the lymph nodes in the pelvis may cause difficulty in passing faeces and constipation
- Some tumours cause an elevation in the levels of calcium in the blood, and the clinical signs related to this abnormality (weakness, drinking more) are noticed first by the owner

An elevated blood calcium level is seen in 27 to 90% of animals with anal sac tumours. The blood calcium level tends to fall with successful treatment, and a recurrence of the high blood calcium level often indicates recurrence of the tumour.
Diagnostic testing

When this tumour is suspected, a rectal examination and a biopsy are performed to confirm the diagnosis. Other diagnostic tests are also performed to determine which sites of the body are affected and to identify whether the blood calcium level is elevated.

These tests include:

- Blood samples for haematology (looking at red and white blood cells) and biochemistry (looking at various factors including blood calcium levels and internal organ function)
- Urine analysis
- CT scan or X-ray examination of the chest
- CT scan, X-ray, or ultrasound examination of the abdomen (tummy)

Outcome and prognosis (outlook)

Anal sac tumours are malignant and have the potential to spread, so many animals are not completely cured of their tumour with treatment. However, with appropriate treatment, we can improve the quality of life for our patients for a long period of time.

The average survival time for dogs with all dogs with anal sac tumours following appropriate therapy is of the order of 12 to 18 months, and those patients with earlier stage disease generally have a longer survival time. Even in the presence of spread to the lymph nodes, the survival time following surgical removal of the affected lymph nodes is 12 months, and it is likely that this can be further improved with chemotherapy.

The outcome tends to be poorer for patients with the following:

- High blood calcium
- Large tumours, particularly greater than 10cm across
- Tumour spread to the lymph nodes and lungs

However, even in the presence of these factors, effective therapy to improve the quality of life of such patients can still be offered.

Why should I bring my pet to Willows for diagnosis and treatment of anal sac tumour?

Our oncology service is run by highly experienced recognised accredited Specialists and we aim to provide the best possible care and treatment for your pet in our state-of-the-art hospital. Our oncology team works closely with the other Specialists at Willows including those who run our sophisticated imaging facilities, as well as with our 24-hour veterinary and nursing staff, all of whom help to give our patients the best possible outcome.

If you have any queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.