

Anal furunculosis

Anal furunculosis is a skin condition of dogs that causes painful ulcers and inflammation around the anus. It is not entirely clear what causes the disease and some breeds are more prone than others. Sometimes the ulceration affects the rectum and anal sacs as well as the local skin and can cause severe open sinuses and infected cavities around the anus.

It is not entirely clear what the underlying cause of this disease is. It is likely to be immune mediated and may be similar to the mechanisms that cause Crohn's disease in humans. The immune system defences that would normally protect the skin around the anus from the bacteria in the large bowel fail and this causes over-reaction of the remaining immune system resulting in tissue damage that is then perpetuated by the dog licking at the area.

The disease is usually diagnosed with a biopsy of the affected area. Once the diagnosis is confirmed, the first line of treatment is to use oral medication to reduce the activity of the immune system and allow the skin to heal. Drugs that can be used include Cyclosporin, Azathiaprine and steroids. Some dogs also benefit from dietary modification and treatment of underlying inflammatory bowel conditions.

Sometimes surgery is necessary to remove very large ulcers or to remove an anal sac that is adjacent or involved with an ulcer.

The long term outlook can be good with up to 95% of cases responding well to medical therapy. Some of these dogs may even remain well when the therapy is withdrawn once the lesions are fully healed. However up to 40% of dogs can suffer relapse and a many dogs will need to remain on treatment for life.