

Perianal Fistulas

Perianal fistulas (also known as anal furunculosis) is a condition found most frequently in the German Shepherd Dog and Shepherd mixes, though it is not exclusive to this breed. It is chronic infection and ulceration of the tissues surrounding the anus. In addition to the visible signs, there are often fistulous tracts which run under the skin and along the rectal wall.

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associated with the disease process and may be removed as part of the treatment for the condition. Perianal fistulas can often reoccur in animals that have been previously treated and free of symptoms.

The lesions are draining, fistulous openings around the anus that run deeply under the skin and do not heal.

Many dogs with perianal fistulas show no overt signs other than excessive licking of the anal region. In advanced cases, the scarring caused by the fistulas around the anus may cause the dog to have difficulty defecating and painful defecation. If the fistulas are severe enough, the anus may not be able to properly close, resulting in fecal incontinence. The stool may be rope-like and thin.

There is no one treatment that has been shown to consistently cure perianal fistulas. Surgical excision of the fistulas and repair of the defects has shown good results in 50% of cases. The success of the surgery will depend on the depth and placement of the fistulous tracts. A course of immunomodulating drugs,



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such as Cyclosporin, may be instituted before surgery to shrink the tracts or may eliminate the need for surgery and control the disease. Prednisone has also shown some success in shrinking the tracts.

If surgery is pursued, one of the complications is fecal incontinence. Once a dog is diagnosed with perianal fistulas, it should be considered a life long condition. Relapses and recurrence are as high as 50% and some dogs are never disease free.



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