

One of the more disconcerting moments of dog ownership is when your canine companion develops objectionable "doggy odor." Aside from the esthetic implications, many bad odors in dogs can indicate health problems. It is not uncommon for a client to bring their dog in, usually looking quite embarrassed, with the only complaint being that the dog smells bad. In my opinion this is a legitimate complaint and certainly merits investigation. A healthy dog shouldn't have any strong odor. If it does, moving his sleeping spot from your bedroom, to the livingroom, to the garage, is not the answer to the problem. Should you choose to ignore the problem you will wish you hadn't when you load up your gear, put your faithful hunting pal in his crate in the back of the car and take off on a long trip. As the odometer rolls along and the smell gets overwhelming it will soon be you and not the dog riding with your head out the window and your tongue hanging out.

Presented with the offensive dog I start by asking the owner to characterize the odor. This usually elicits various nose-wrinkling, face-contorting moments before they proclaim it to be a real "doggy odor." Still I feel obliged to ask this inane simple question hoping that one day I'll strike pay dirt and they'll hand me the diagnosis with a succinct description of that smell. I generally start at the dogs head and move back, checking all the spots that are usual trouble areas for smell. I have covered several areas in previous articles. Bad teeth with associated tartar and gingivitis produce very bad halitosis. Lifting the lips and examining the teeth all the way back while inhaling deeply will usually rule the teeth in or out as the problem. Accumulation of yellow, brown or even greenish tartar on the outer surfaces, usually of the upper back teeth with associated swollen red gums

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Tell-Tale Doggy Odor



Robin Stronk with her springer "Babe"

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that bleed easily, indicates the need for a dental cleaning to improve conditions. There is one special situation that is especially common in spaniels that can be confusing. The odor is most certainly coming from the mouth but the teeth and gums look great. In many spaniels there is a long fold in the lower lip just in front of the corner of the mouth. If the hair is white in this area it is usually stained rusty color from saliva keeping the area moist. The area can develop a superficial skin infection called lip fold pyoderma as a result of the moist condition. If this is the case, as soon as you begin to get your nose near

the area, your brain will scream out, "LOW TIDE!" This is a universal message and even if you have never been near the sea coast, there is a genetic knowledge of what rotting marine life on mud flats in the hot sun smells like. You will hardly be able to believe that a few centimeters of body surface can produce such an overwhelmingly pungent odor, but believe you must.

The situation is easily remedied by gently clipping all hair out of the fold on either side, cleansing with antibacterial soap such as betadine and applying antibiotic cream in the fold for several days. By eliminating the moist environment bacteria won't flourish and produce the noxious vapors you had been noticing. Dogs with particularly deep lip folds will need to have the hair trimmed regularly, especially during warm humid weather.

Next stop in the olfactory treasure hunt is the ears. I've mentioned this in a previous column but will remind all spaniel owners that their dog's ears are often infected quite extensively before the owner is aware of the problem. If you don't look, the smell may be your only indication that something is amiss. The detective work is usually over as soon as you lift up the ear flap and take a cursory look/whiff in the ear. Some dogs can be extremely stoic and you may be amazed at what you find. Redness, accumulation of wax and discharge, even ulceration inside the ear canal may be present and ample cause for bad odor.

Most common by far, as a cause of objectionable smell in the dog, is skin disorders. I have been delighted to find that working spaniels have far fewer skin problems than their (distant) bench cousins. When the skin is inflamed, whatever the inciting cause may be, it stimulates the sebaceous glands (oil glands) to produce more sebum than normal. The excessive oil causes the dog to

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have a very rancid odor. The problem escalates as the inflamed greasy skin provides an ideal environment for invasion of Staph bacteria leading to secondary skin infection and more odor. Handling a dog in the early stages leaves your hands feeling as if you have been handling sheep. To me this is the true essence of "doggy odor" or "eau d'itch". The elimination of this odor revolves around identification and elimination of the causative agent although simple hygiene in the form of antiseborrheic shampoos alone will often work wonders.

Saving the best for last, there are two major categories of bad smelling effluvium that may emanate from your dog's sphincter area. The most obvious is flatulence which almost all owners are able to identify without benefit of professional assistance. Usually traceable to "dietary indiscretion" (the politically correct term for

when your dog knocks over the trash, finds that delectable overripe carcass, the unattended and clearly beckoning hors d'oeuvres tray, etc.) these are usually transient events. Prolonged problems may require closer questioning and examination of the gastrointestinal tract by your veterinarian. Finally at the very end of the tale (tail?) we have the elusive anal glands. Many fortunate owners may not even know of their existence. They are paired glands on either side of the anus that are analogous to the skunks scent glands. The accumulated secretion should empty through a narrow duct with each bowel movement, giving each dog's stool its particular identifying odor. A canine calling card so to speak. The problems arise when the duct becomes clogged, preventing the sac from emptying. The secretions continue to accumulate causing discomfort to

the dog and they may even become secondarily infected. While anal gland secretion is fascinating and incredibly exciting to the canine olfactory apparatus, it is equally repugnant to the human nose. Dogs with anal sac infection or impaction can walk around in a cloud of this nasty fishy aroma. When I have reached this point in my search for the mystifying bad odor, I don an exam glove and by rectal manipulation empty the contents of the anal sacs. I then invite the owner to join me behind the dog. At this point I can almost visualize the light bulb flashing on over their head as their eyes pop open wide, nostrils quiver and they shout, "THAT'S IT!" The search is over, mystery solved. We all seek our gratification where we must, but I find that moment very satisfying. I haven't solved the budget crisis or found a cure for AIDS but, by golly, the owner now knows why their dog smells bad. ■

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