

# Anal Gland Cancer in Dogs

## Dr. Phil Zeltzman, DVM, DACVS, CVJ

Dr. Phil Zeltzman is a board-certified veterinary surgeon and author. His traveling practice takes him all over Eastern Pennsylvania and Western New Jersey. You can visit his website at [www.DrPhilZeltzman.com](http://www.DrPhilZeltzman.com), and follow him at [www.facebook.com/DrZeltzman](https://www.facebook.com/DrZeltzman).

*AJ Debiasse, a technician in Stroudsburg, PA, contributed to this article.*

The obnoxious substance coming out of the anal glands is supposed to help [dogs](#) mark their territory when they defecate. In reality, anal glands can cause all kinds of problems in dogs (and occasionally in [cats](#)). They can get blocked, infected or even turn into [cancer](#).

Anal gland cancer was the sad fate of Conan, a sweet 9-year-old Lab. His guardians had become concerned when they noticed that his stool seemed thinner than usual. Conan was healthy otherwise. Based on a physical exam including blood work and [X-rays](#), he had a firm mass, about the size of a golf ball, in an anal gland. It was highly likely to be cancer (adenocarcinoma).

### What is adenocarcinoma?

Adenocarcinoma is the most common cancerous anal gland tumor in dogs. It's a very aggressive cancer and has a high probability of metastasizing (spreading) to the lymph nodes and other organs. The recommendation for treatment is surgical removal as soon as possible. This surgery is tricky and does not have a high success rate, if not done properly. The cancer may return even if surgery is done properly because there is very limited space around the tumor, making it difficult to remove the cancer entirely.

### Using chemo beads to treat anal gland cancer

For about 7 years, I have used "[chemo beads](#)" in addition to surgery to help decrease the chances of the cancer returning in that area. Chemo beads are tiny pearls (about 1/10 of an inch in diameter) that contain a tiny dose of a chemo drug called cisplatin.

Chemo drugs kill cells that multiply rapidly, such as

cancer cells. They can also affect cells that multiply in healing tissue, such as the [skin](#). One of the few side-effects of the chemo beads is that they can slow down healing. After surgery and placement of the chemo beads, Conan did have problems with healing of the skin, but eventually healed completely and made an amazing recovery.

### Conan's recovery from anal gland cancer

Conan's guardians were absolute troopers throughout and after the recovery period. They regularly sent me pictures of Conan running on the beach, swimming, and having a ball (pun intended). This is critically important: rather than lamenting on the fact that their dog had cancer, they continued to enjoy every possible moment with him. They understood that rather than quantity of life (survival time), they should focus on quality of life.

### Here are a few memorable quotes from Conan's guardian, that I hope may help others in this situation:

- "With cancer, you never know the outcome. Cancer is a horrible disease that dictates its own terms."
- "Without your surgery Conan would not be here. That is a fact. We gave him some extra time. That was truly just spectacular for all of us. To be given the gift of life is remarkable."
- "The only thing you can be sure of is that we will fight till the end with a smile, one day at a time."
- "I took Conan for a 3 mile run this morning and it was a fantastic run. To see his high spirit, jumping over the logs and trees and smiling, being truly happy, is something I will never forget. We are kicking cancer's butt for now."

### Questions to ask your family vet or your surgeon:

- Who is the best person to remove it?
- What else can we do besides surgery?
- Do you know a surgeon who uses chemo beads?