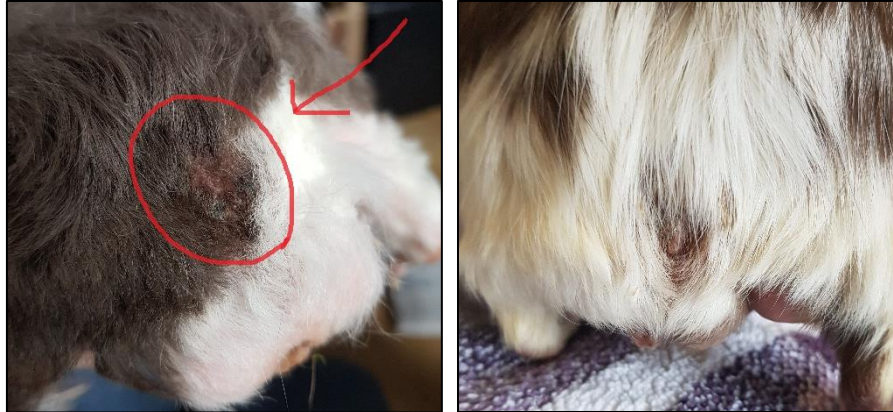




## A Sticky Matter: Grease Glands

First of all, you need to know **where** the grease gland actually is. Some people call it the scent gland. It is a small area on the skin in the precise location their tail would be, if they had one. It's around an inch up their rump if you're measuring them from a standard sedentary seated position and sometimes you can even see it as a sort of 'dimple' in their fur, giving them the impression of having a rather human-like bottom!

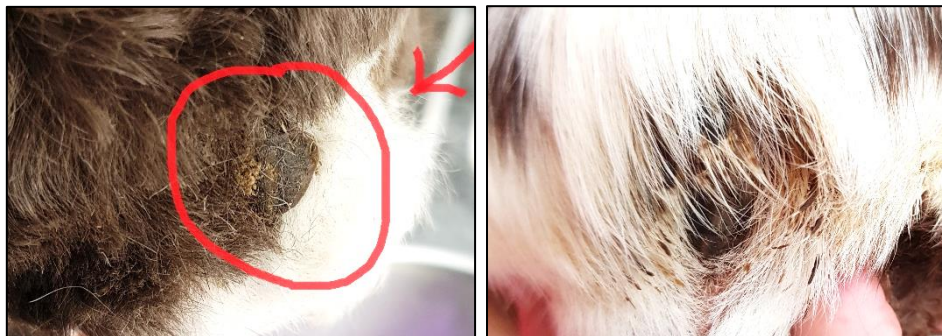


**Both males AND females have these glands** so don't be fooled into thinking you're safe if you have a girls only household. I've certainly encountered more boar grease gland issues myself but I do know others who have experienced just the same level of bother with their sows.

Not all pigs will have very active glands, though. Many will never seem to develop anything beyond a very tiny patch of surface stickiness. That's ok, normal, you don't have to do anything - but do still check at least monthly that it stays that way! Do check more often in summer however, **especially important if your pigs are long-haired, elderly or infirm.**

Some pigs however... it's a glorified mess of sticky grease, hay, sometimes even food and bedding, not to mention dead skin cells and hair - all matted up with grease. And although it's normal, just the sign of an active gland, getting tangles and debris involved is precisely what you want to avoid and thereafter keep on top of.

To begin with, I'm showing you some of the more extreme examples of what can happen if grease glands are left unchecked. So much grease has built up in these cases that the entire gland is blocked. The risks associated with blocked grease glands include infection - if bacteria get between the gland and the blockage - and pain, as the packed grease and any other debris caught up in it begins to pull on the surrounding hair. **It also increases the risk of flystrike as flies LOVE this kind of dirt and basic lack of hygiene.**



Now that you know where the grease gland is and why it needs maintenance, I'll tell you **HOW** to tell if it needs cleaning and if so, how to do it and how often.



## HOW TO CHECK THE GLAND

As always, any sick/infirm, elderly, and long-haired piggies need checking more often, as these are the groups at the highest risk of developing a blockage, matting and being more vulnerable to flystrike. **If you know your piggies grease gland is very active and gets stickied up regularly, then you will also need to do a routine check on them.** Also keep a close eye on any pregnant sows - they're much less mobile than the average piggy and if they're a sow with a very sticky grease gland, you could be looking at trouble you can otherwise avoid!

To check the grease gland, a visual inspection will give you a rough idea. If the hair around the gland is looking very dirty then you need to clean the gland. If you can't see the gland because of long hair, you need to move the hair out of the way and look for evidence of sticky matts and dirt in the hair.

A visual check on its own may be enough to tell you that they need a degrease. Sometimes you need to feel the gland with your fingertips and dig a little deeper under the coat to check the activity. If it's only just sticky to the touch and there's no dirt around the gland, you're good to leave it be.

## HOW TO CLEAN THE GREASE GLAND

You don't need to bath the guinea to degrease the gland. What you do need to do is tuck them into the side of your body along your forearm, with their face by your elbow and bottom in your hand. This method of handling is by far the easiest I've found as it balances comfort of the piggy with complete control and free access with one hand for me.

The 3 most common products for degreasing are:

- Swarfega
- Coconut Oil
- Washing-up liquid

I've personally tried all three and find that results can vary, usually depending on how badly affected the hair is by the grease. I've known hundreds of owners in all areas of expertise over many years who swear by each of these options.

Wet your free hand then dip your fingertips into your chosen product. Use your fingertips to apply the neat product to the grease gland. Massage thoroughly, not just into the gland but in any dirty and sticky areas around the gland. Wet your hand intermittently while doing this so the product gradually dilutes a little and you can begin to use the combined product and water on your hand to assist with peeling away any large grease formations. Apply more product if needed; I usually do at least 2 rounds simply because you get the main layers of grease off first time and then you want to clean up the surrounding hair and gland of the residual stickiness.

**If the pig is long-haired and/or the grease has caused a matt or stuck the hair together, carefully trim this out.** I recommend doing this after some degreasing has taken place rather than before, as it's harder (and pulls more) to cut out dry/hard or sticky grease than it is when it's pliable having been broken down a bit.

***Note that you won't achieve a fully non-stick pig. Their grease gland is designed to be sticky. It's just not meant to be caked in grease to the point it has blocked the gland or is causing the hair to become tangled or filthy.***



To finish up, rinse the pigs grease gland and bottom with warm running water/dip just their bottom into a shallow sink of warm water/use a warm wet cloth to rinse off the residue. Towel dry, and release the pig until next time - although if it's winter and your pigs live outdoors, you will need to keep them indoors until they're fully dry. Hairdryers can be used to assist drying but do be careful with the heat setting and always ensure you have hold of the pig before turning the hairdryer on.

*Last updated: January 2024*