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## ANAL ABSCESS/FISTULA

A patient who feels ill and complains of chills, fever and pain in the rectum or anus could be suffering from an anal abscess or fistula.

### What is an anal abscess?

An anal abscess is an infected cavity filled with pus found near the anus or rectum.

### What is an anal fistula?

An anal fistula, almost always the result of a previous abscess, is a small tunnel connecting the anal gland from which the abscess arose to the skin of the buttocks outside the anus.

### What causes an abscess?

An abscess results from an acute infection of a small gland just inside the anus, when bacteria or foreign matter enters the tissue through the gland.

### What causes a fistula?

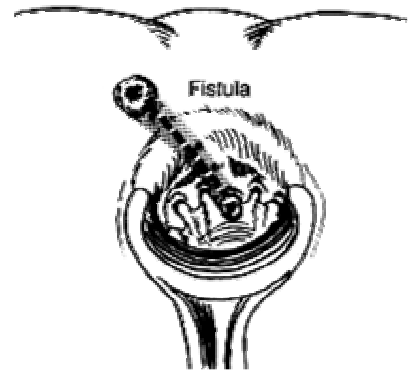
After an abscess has been drained, a tunnel may persist connecting the anal gland from which the abscess arose to the skin. If this occurs, persistent drainage from the outside opening may indicate the persistence of this tunnel. If the outside opening of the tunnel heals, recurrent abscess may develop.

### What are the symptoms of an abscess or fistula?

Symptoms of both ailments include constant pain, sometimes accompanied by swelling, that is not necessarily related to bowel movements. Other symptoms include irritation of skin around the anus, drainage of pus (which often relieves the pain), fever, and feeling generally unwell.

### Does an abscess always become a fistula?

No. A fistula develops in about 30 percent of all abscess cases, and there is really no way to predict if this will occur.

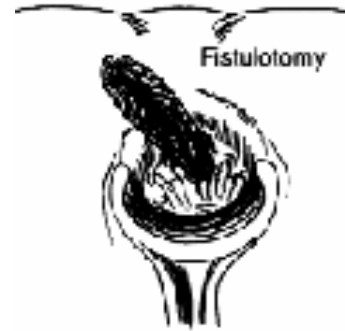


## How is an abscess treated?

An abscess is treated by draining the pus from the infected cavity under general anaesthetic.

## What about treatment for a fistula?

Surgery is almost always necessary to cure an anal fistula. Usually a *Seton* (a plastic tube) is inserted to allow the acute infection to drain. Fistula surgery usually involves cutting a small portion of the anal sphincter muscle to open the tunnel, joining the external and internal opening and converting the tunnel into a groove that will then heal from within outward. This is called laying open a fistula.



## What do I need to do post-op?

The pain post-op is usually not too severe and simple painkillers are sufficient (eg: Tramal, Digesic, Panadol). It is important not to get constipated and codeine based painkillers are best avoided. Taking a Sitz bath, especially after bowel motions, is soothing. (Mix 1 tablespoon of salt into a warm bath with soap)

## What are the chances of a recurrence of an abscess or fistula?

Fistulas can recur and this can be the most difficult and demanding surgery encountered. A number of options are available for complex fistulas and these include: fibrin glue, cutting seton, and rectal advancement flaps.