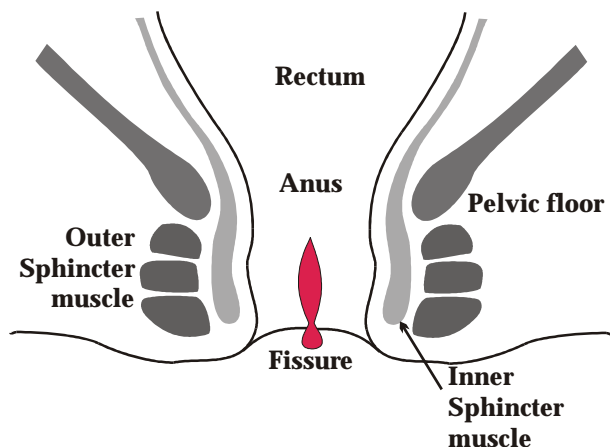


What is a fissure?

The anus (back passage) is normally lined with soft and delicate tissue. Occasionally, the tissue is damaged by the passage of a hard or large motion. This tear is called a 'fissure'. Usually the tear heals up of its own accord over a few days or weeks.



Sometimes the tear does not heal. This may be for several reasons:

- the anus is irritated by the pain and this causes the muscles surrounding the anus to remain too tense. This stops the blood supply to the lining of the back passage and so the healing process is stopped. This spasm of the muscles is often felt as pain remaining for some time after the passage of a motion.
- Motions may be painful to pass and this tends to cause people to delay going to the toilet. This in turn causes the motions to be hard and so more likely to damage the tear.

What treatments do we use?

Laxatives

The first step to getting the fistula to heal is to prevent further damage. The motions must be soft and easy to pass to reduce the damage to the lining of the back passage. You can help to keep the motions soft by eating a diet high in fibre, drinking plenty of fluid with meals and you may well be given a mild laxative such as lactulose from the chemist.

Painkillers

Simple pain killers such as Paracetamol can help greatly with the discomfort while the tear is still healing. Local anaesthetic creams may also help.

Relaxants for the muscles of the anus

Several treatments can be used to stop the muscles of the anus from going into spasm. The commonest is an ointment called **GTN**. This is applied to the skin close to the edge of the anus regularly to keep the muscles relaxed. It is important to continue with the treatment even if the pain eases as it is necessary to get the tear fully healed.

Potential side effects of GTN treatment

The main side effect is a flushed feeling and a mild headache. Some people feel light headed as well. This is usually minor but if the symptoms cause a problem you should stop the treatment and see you GP.

If the tear does not heal it may be necessary to reduce the pressure in the inner sphincter muscle another way.

Injections

The anus can be injected with a chemical (BoTox) which causes temporary weakness in the muscles so allowing the tear to heal. The weakness lasts about 3 months and wears off completely afterwards.

Surgery ('sphincterotomy')

The inner sphincter muscle can be weakened by cutting some of the lowest parts of it. This is most effective when the muscles are very tight and not responding to other treatments.

Potential side effects of Injections and Surgery

Any treatment which weakens the muscles of the back passage may cause some leakage to occur. Since the main muscle (the outer one) is not damaged, the risk of leakage is very small (minor leakage happens 1 in 20 times, major problems 1 in 50 times). This is reversible after the injections wear off but not so after surgery.

How to stop the fissure returning.

The main thing is to prevent damage to the lining of the back passage by hard or large motions.

1. You can help to keep the motions soft by eating a diet high in fibre, drinking plenty of fluid with meals and, if necessary, taking mild laxatives such as lactulose or fybogel from the chemist.
2. Try not to strain when passing motions. Go to the toilet when you feel the urge. Different people have different numbers of bowel actions in a day. Don't try and strain to have a bowel action unless you feel the urge to and don't try too hard to 'push out every little bit'!..



*Fissure
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Ano*

Patient Information

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