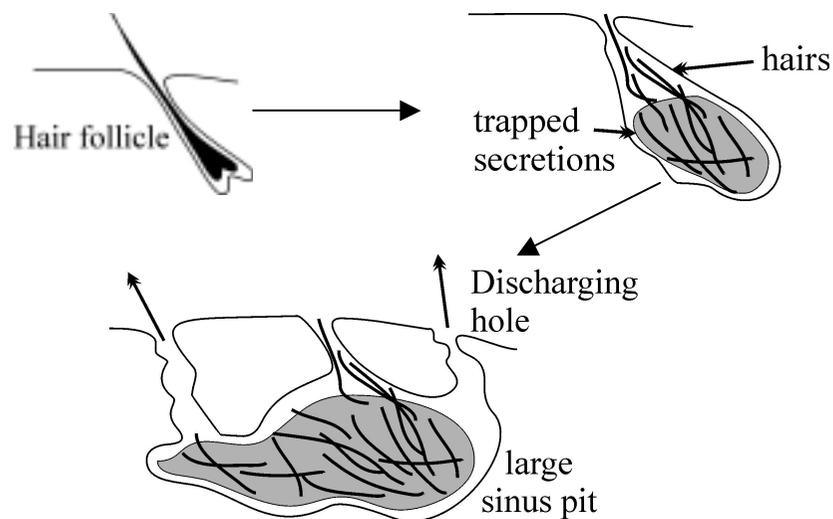


### What is a pilonidal sinus?

'Pilonidal sinus' means a 'nest of hairs' in Greek. The skin between the cheeks of the buttocks usually contains many hair follicles. If the hairs become caught under the skin rather than being shed as normal, over a period of time the hairs can collect, along with trapped secretions and bacteria. This is the start of a pilonidal sinus. This is more common in men, dark haired people, hairy people and those who spend a lot of time sitting down.



### What problems can a pilonidal sinus cause?

The commonest problem is an irritating discharge. The trapped secretions and bacteria often spill out onto the skin and cause inflammation or itching. If the secretions become truly infected then an abscess can develop which causes pain, swelling and redness. Occasionally more than one 'sinus' develops and then infection and inflammation trapped under the skin can spread around the area between the buttocks. In severe cases the infection can appear in several different places at once with many areas of discharge and infection. The condition very rarely appears anywhere else than between the buttocks, does not affect the bowels and is not life threatening.

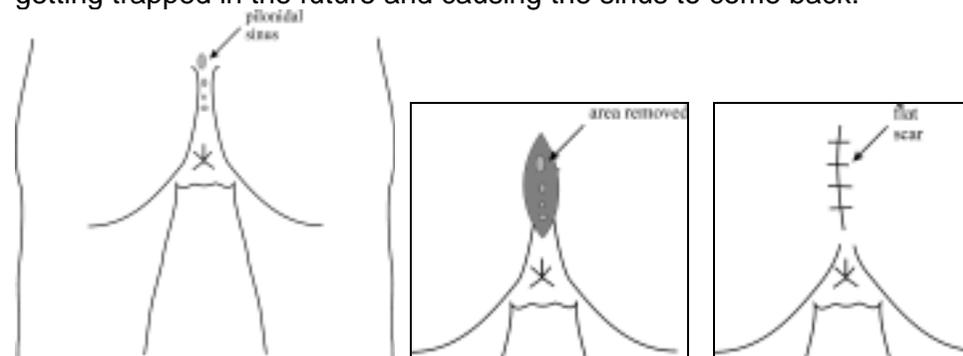
### What treatments do we use?

The most important treatment is to keep the area between the buttocks clean and dry. Regular showers or baths with careful but not over-vigorous drying are important. Avoid putting talcum powder or deodorants between the cheeks as these can get trapped and make the problem worse.

### Surgery for pilonidal sinus

When the condition is particularly troublesome it may be best to remove the scarred and infected skin along with the sinus. This is done by cutting out the

pilonidal sinus and sewing the unaffected skin back together. If the affected area is large, it is sometimes necessary to move the skin of the buttocks slightly to close the gap left after removal. The surgery is often designed to make the valley between the buttocks shallower to try to prevent hairs getting trapped in the future and causing the sinus to come back.



### What to expect after surgery.

**Appearance** – there will always be a scar. It may be quite small or quite large depending on the size of the problem. The shape of the valley between the buttocks is often altered to be flatter.

**Follow-up care** – keeping the area clean and dry is important. Gentle exercise is allowed but strenuous activity or sitting for long periods which put a strain on the scar are to be avoided until it is well healed. You may need to keep the area free of new hairs by shaving while the operation heals which can be up to 3 weeks.

**Stitches** – there are usually stitches to be removed between 10 days and 2 weeks after surgery.

### Potential complications of surgery

The main concern is that the wound may not heal first time. The area can be sweaty, may rub on clothes and moves a lot during walking and exercise. Around 1 in 10 wounds become infected or open up to some extent and although they will heal eventually, this may take longer than planned. In some people the problem reoccurs and further surgery may be necessary.

### When to be seen again.

If the wound becomes hot and angry an infection may be present. This may need antibiotics or an inspection of the area.

If the scar opens up, it usually only needs nursing treatment and dressings but if it is troublesome you should seek help.



*Pilonidal  
Sinus  
Patient Information*

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