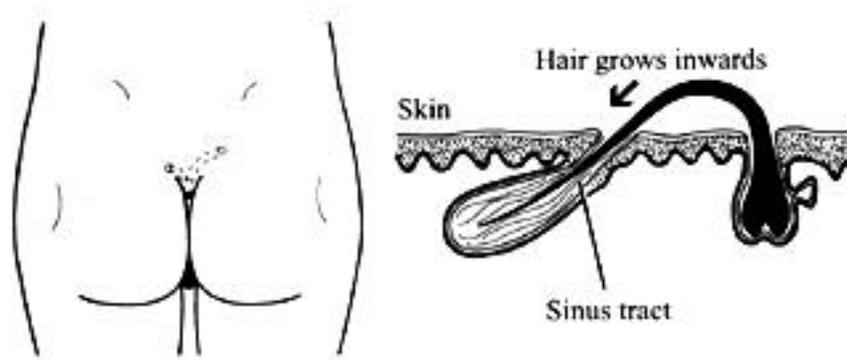


Pilonidal Sinus Operation

Your Questions Answered

What is a pilonidal sinus?

A pilonidal sinus is an inflamed sinus tract (or tracts, as there can be more than one) which leads to a cavity under the skin between the buttocks (see diagram). It is thought that the condition is started by hairs growing inwards into the skin. The tract and cavity often become infected, causing a discharge. If an abscess forms, this may cause a swelling and can burst. A pilonidal sinus can cause chronic problems, sometimes over several years. Pilonidal sinus is relatively common and often affects young adults, especially men.



How will the operation help me?

The operation removes the layer of skin that lines the sinus tract and removes any infected tissue. There are several different operations that can be done, depending upon the exact nature of your individual problem. Your surgeon will discuss the operation that would best suit you.

What preparation is needed before the operation?

Sometimes it is possible to do this operation as a day case. If not, you will either come into hospital the day before, or on the morning of the operation. Usually no specific preparation is needed, except the routine blood tests done before any operation. You will be asked some questions about your general state of health by the nurses and doctors on the ward, and this is a good time to discuss any further questions you have about the operation.

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What will happen when I come back from the operating theatre?

You will have a dressing in place around the entrance to the sinus. Some discomfort is to be expected. Painkillers or local anaesthetic gel are available: please ask your nurse if you need something to help with discomfort.

You will normally have a bath the next day and this will soak the dressing out (it may need a little gentle pull). It is quite possible that you may bleed a little in the bath (do not be alarmed - this can make the water look very red!). Ask your nurse for assistance if you are concerned. You will probably find that frequent baths are soothing to the area.

When you are awake you will be able to eat and drink as you wish, and to get up as soon as you feel able. It is advisable to stay on the ward until the effects of the anaesthetic have completely worn off.

Dressing your wound

It is essential that the sinus tract heals from the base upwards towards the skin. While you are in hospital your dressing will be done twice each day. Gauze soaked in saline water will be used to line the tract and to make sure that the skin does not heal over before the tract is healed.

When you are to go home your nurse will discuss with you how best to continue your dressings at home. If your wound is in a place that you can reach the nurses will show you how to dress it yourself. If you cannot reach to do your own dressing, you may have someone at home who can help, or a district nurse may need to be involved.

It is very important that hairs do not grow into the healing tract. In some cases it may be necessary to shave any hairs which do grow. The doctor will discuss this with you if it is necessary when you come for your post-operative outpatient check.

Personal hygiene

It is important to keep the area clean. While you are in hospital you should take a bath or shower, or use the bidet after each time you open your bowels. After a bowel motion you should wipe toilet paper away from your wound. Women should remember to wipe front to back, away from the vaginal area.

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Once you are home, taking a bath every time you open your bowels may become less practical, but you should continue to wash after a bowel action if at all possible for 3-4 weeks after the operation. You may find that sitting on the edge of the bath and using a shower attachment (if available) is a convenient way of cleaning the area.

How long will I be in hospital?

If your operation is not done as a day case we will usually want you to stay in hospital 2-3 days after the operation, but this can vary between individuals.

How long should I stay off work?

The time taken to get back to normal activities varies for different people. Do as much as you feel comfortable doing. If you need to take painkillers these may make you drowsy, so you should avoid driving or operating machinery. If lifting causes you discomfort you should avoid it. Most people need a few days off work, but this will depend on what you do. It is important for you to pay attention to your body, and only do as much as you feel able to.

Returning to normal activities

- It will be necessary to continue daily dressing of your wound until it has completely healed.
- Try to avoid excessive walking or sitting still until your wound has healed.
- It would be unwise to go swimming as chlorine may affect healing and there is a risk of picking up or passing on an infection.
- You should also try to avoid any friction in the area, as might be caused by tight clothing.
- You can resume sexual relations as soon as this feels comfortable.

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How long will the pilonidal sinus take to heal?

Pilonidal sinuses vary a lot in the time that they take to heal. Some can take several months and this can be very frustrating. Sometimes hairs can grow inside the tract, and these will need to be shaved off or they can impair healing. It is important to try to be patient, and to continue the dressings for as long as necessary.

With thanks to the Friends of St. Mark's Hospital for supporting the production of this leaflet.