

What are the precautions I should take after having the surgery?

After the operation you should try to avoid sitting for two weeks; instead stand or lie down. This will reduce the chance of infection. Keep the wound clean by showering and then using a hair-dryer to dry it. Wear loose clothes to avoid getting sweaty. After opening your bowels, be careful not to wipe towards the wound and cause infection. If the wound has been stitched it will usually heal in three – four weeks.

If it has been left open or if it gets infected and opens up, it can take three - four months to heal. You need to visit the hospital to have the area shaved and checked until it has healed

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Pilonidal sinus

A patient's guide



.... caring for you 

What is pilonidal sinus?

A pilonidal sinus is a small hole or tunnel in the skin, usually at the very top of the cleft between the buttocks. These pits in the skin can easily become filled with bits of skin and hair, and can get infected with bacteria. As these pits fill they can get blocked and can get bigger, eventually forming a tunnel under the skin, filled with pus.

What causes pilonidal sinus?

Pilonidal sinuses form when hairs grow into tiny pits between the buttocks. It is not clear why they form, but it could be due to pressure or friction in this area, combined with the presence of clumps of hair.

Who can be affected by this condition?

Pilonidal sinuses are most common in young adults, and are rarely seen in children or people over 40 years old. They happen more often in men rather than women, and seem to occur most frequently in people with a lot of body hair.

You are more likely to develop a pilonidal sinus if you are obese, not very active, or spend lots of time sitting down. Other factors that increase your chances of this condition include previous injury or frequent irritation of the skin between the buttocks, or a family history of pilonidal sinuses.

What symptoms can I get?

Pilonidal sinuses do not usually have any symptoms until they become infected. You may notice a painless bump or a hole in the skin between your buttocks while washing yourself. When a pilonidal sinus becomes infected, it can be sore, red and swollen. The symptoms usually develop over a number of days. In these cases of acute infection, pain and swelling appear quickly and soon an infected abscess full of pus develops in the surrounding skin.

Pilonidal sinus can also be a long-term problem that keeps coming back. It may cause some pain but then pus comes out from the sinus, and the pain eases as the pressure is released. The pus may be stained with blood. This cycle may continue for some time, and even if it is not always painful, the infection will not go away until it is treated.

What are the treatment options?

If you have pilonidal sinus without any symptoms, treatment is not required. To avoid infection, keep the area clean, and dry well after washing.

In an acute infection when the area around the pits becomes painful, red and is discharging pus your doctor will give you antibiotics and you may need an emergency operation to drain the pus.

Sometimes these infections keep coming back and you will be advised an operation to remove the sinus. For immediate relief while waiting for your surgery (as this is not an emergency operation), you can soak the area in warm water and take painkillers such as ibuprofen, which will also help ease the swelling.

If you have a lot of hair in this area it may be helpful to remove it in order to reduce chances of having further infections. This can be done by careful shaving or waxing. Some people have laser removal of the hair between the buttocks.

What does surgery for pilonidal sinus involve?

When you have an abscess the emergency operation simply drains the infection. To get rid of a pilonidal sinus completely is only straightforward at a time when there is no abscess. The operation involves removing an oval piece of skin and the fatty tissue underneath that contains the nest of hairs that cause infection.

Usually the skin from the two sides can be sewn together afterwards leaving the crack between the buttocks flatter. Occasionally, if there is infection or if the operation has been done before, the wound is better left open.

