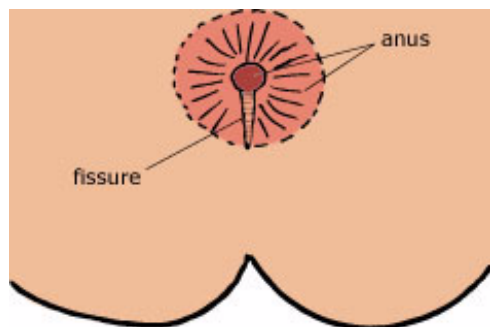


Anal fissure

What is an anal fissure?

It is a crack or tear at the margin of the anus that extends from the skin into the soft lining of the anus. It can affect all ages and tends to occur in women and infants.



What are the symptoms?

- sharp, often severe pain on opening the bowels
- pain or discomfort when sitting on a hard surface
- spots of blood on the toilet paper or underwear

When the bowels are opened, especially for a hard or large stool, the fissure causes spasm of the circular muscle that controls the anus. The resultant pain can last for several minutes and up to an hour.

What causes an anal fissure?

The tear, which is generally small, usually develops after stretching of the anus from passing a hard, large stool. It is associated with constipation, multiple pregnancies and Crohn's disease. Anal intercourse increases the likelihood of a fissure.

What about infants?

Anal fissures in children usually occur with constipation, and possibly result in refusal to defecate. Recovery usually occurs quickly if the stool is softened. Maltogen 1% can be added to the formula, and fluids should be increased. Treatment includes applying a local anaesthetic ointment to

the anus whenever the child shows a desire to defecate, until healing occurs.

What is the usual outcome?

Adults usually recover in about 4 weeks, especially if the fissure is small. More severe cases may not heal without the benefit of a small operation.

How can anal fissures be prevented?

The secret is to avoid constipation and answer nature's call to stool when it comes instead of putting it off. Stools are kept soft by drinking several glasses of water each day, by a high fibre diet and by regular exercise. Some people may find it necessary to use laxatives such as ispaghula (Fybogel, Agiolax).

What is the treatment?

- Prevent constipation; keep the stool soft.
- Gently clean the anus with cottonwool and warm water after each bowel movement.
- Apply a towel soaked in very warm water for painful spasm or take a sitz bath (20 cm of warm water with a small amount of added salt in the bathtub) for about 20 minutes twice a day.
- Take analgesics such as aspirin or paracetamol for pain.
- Apply petroleum jelly (Vaseline) or zinc oxide ointment around the anus to soothe the area.
- A special ointment containing local anaesthetic or a dilute version of ointment used for angina (Rectogesic) is usually prescribed by your doctor to relieve discomfort.

Surgical treatment

If the fissure persists despite all the above attention, some minor procedures will certainly allow it to heal quickly in a few days. This may involve stretching the anus under anaesthetic or cutting the anal sphincter (muscle) under local anaesthetic.