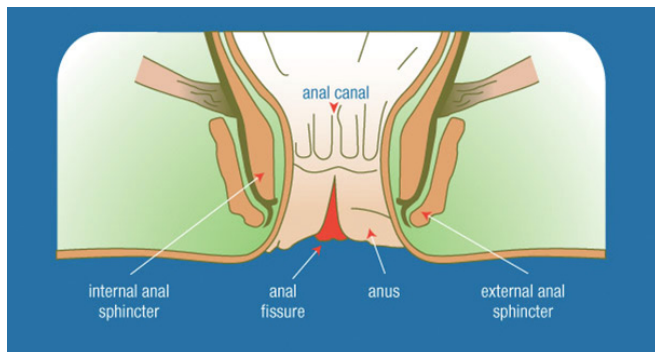


Anal Fissure

An educational handout for patients



What is an anal fissure?

An anal fissure is a tear or a painful ulcer in the skin that lines the anus (bowel opening). Anal fissure is a common problem of the anal region.

There are two types of anal fissure:

- **acute** anal fissure, which heals in a few weeks
- **chronic** anal fissure, which lasts for more than 3 months

What are the symptoms of an anal fissure?

- **Painful tearing, throbbing, burning, or sharp knife-like stabbing**, during and sometimes after a bowel movement
- **Anal discomfort or pain**
- **Bleeding** from the rectum. You may see blood in the toilet or on the toilet paper
- **Anal discharge**, which may stain your underwear and cause itching

What causes an anal fissure?

An anal fissure often starts when the skin that lines the anus is injured. This injury may be caused by the passage of large or hard, pellet-like stools through the anal canal. Other causes may be related to explosive diarrhea or vigorous wiping of the sensitive anal skin. An anal fissure can be very painful because the anal area has many pain receptors.



A vicious cycle of trauma, pain, and spasms, can prevent healing and lead to the development of a chronic anal fissure.

Do I have an anal fissure?

- Talk to a health care provider about your symptoms. Your doctor will do a physical exam, which will include inspecting the anal area.
- Your doctor may treat you, or ask you to see a specialist who treats anal problems, such as a gastroenterologist or a colorectal surgeon.



What is the treatment for an anal fissure?

There are effective ways to ease the pain caused by an anal fissure. Treatment options may include changes to your diet and lifestyle, better bowel habits, proper cleanliness, and medicines.

Diet and lifestyle

- Because the passage of large or hard, pellet-like stools may lead to the formation of an anal fissure, a diet that is high in fiber is advisable because it speeds up the movement of stool through the colon, and produces stools that are soft and easy to pass.
- A good high-fiber diet should have fiber that is easy to digest, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, dried plums (prunes), and unprocessed bran. Fiber supplements such as Metamucil® or Citrucel® may help, as long as you take them with plenty of fluids. A low-fat diet also is helpful, because fats slow down the digestion of food.



Habits

- An irregular pattern of bowel movements can cause poor coordination of the abdominal, rectal, and anal sphincter muscles that regulate bowel movements.
- Regular bowel habits can be helpful. You can time your visits to the toilet and avoid hurried bowel movements. These practices may help prevent the sudden, forceful passage of stool through a partly relaxed anal canal, which can tear the anal skin.

Cleanliness and sitz baths

- Wipe the anal area with moist baby wipes rather than toilet paper. Clean the anal area well to remove irritants that slow down healing.
- Soak the anal area in a shallow, warm water bath (sitz bath) to ease muscle spasms and to remove irritants that slow down healing.



Medicines

Ointments or suppositories may be used to ease pain during and after a bowel movement, and to heal the anal fissure. Clean the anal area with moist baby wipes or with warm soap and water before applying the ointment or inserting a suppository. Be sure your fingernails are clean; you may consider using a disposable glove. **Massage the ointment into the anal opening for about 2 to 3 minutes.**

- **Lidocaine ointment** will ease pain before a bowel movement. It may be applied to the anal area two to three times daily. Possible side effects are irritation and sensitization of the anal skin.



- **Hydrocortisone cream** will help relax the anal muscles and ease pain, itching, and swelling of the anal area. Possible side effects include headache, dizziness, and changes in vision. Contact your doctor if you have any of these side effects.
- **0.2% Nitroglycerin ointment, 2% diltiazem ointment, or 0.2% nifedipine ointment** will relax the anal muscles and ease pain, spasm, and swelling of the anal area. These ointments may be applied two to three times daily after a bowel movement with a clean finger or a gloved finger. Possible side effects include headache, burning sensation, dizziness, and flushing. Contact your doctor if you have any these any of side effects.
- **Suppositories made of a combination of lidocaine and hydrocortisone** may be inserted into the anus to help heal the anal fissure. Suppositories are usually used once or twice a day.
- **Botox** injections can help to heal an anal fissure. An injection can be given at an outpatient clinic. Botox works by relaxing the anal muscles and easing pain. Side effects are rare, but may include trouble controlling gas or stool (for a short time), infection at the site of the injection, or pain during the injection.

All medicines should be used in combination with a high-fiber diet, stool softeners, and sitz baths. Also, avoid straining during bowel movements.

Is surgery an option?

- If you have a chronic anal fissure that remains bothersome and is not healing with medicine alone, your doctor may suggest surgery.
- Surgery involves cutting the anal muscle or stretching the anal sphincter to help the anal muscles to relax during a bowel movement.
- Discuss all treatment options with your doctor before opting for surgery.



For a list of doctors in your area who specialize in gastrointestinal motility problems, go to our web site:

[www • motilitysociety • org](http://www.motilitysociety.org)

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