

UniversityHealthServices

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Anal Fissure

An anal fissure is a fairly common, small tear in the lining of the anus which can cause pain, bleeding, and/or itching. Many times there is bleeding associated with a painful bowel movement. Blood may be noticed in the toilet bowl or on the toilet paper and is generally bright red in color.

Causes

A hard, dry bowel movement can cause a tear in the anal lining. Other causes of a fissure include diarrhea and inflammation of the anorectal area. The diagnosis is usually made by a clinician examining the anus. Occasionally a small viewing instrument, called an anoscope, is used in examination.

Treatment

About 50% - 75% of fissures heal either by themselves or within several weeks to months using the following non-operative treatment:

1. Keep stool soft: use fiber and fluids and regular "bowel movement time"
2. Coat anus with petroleum jelly before each (hard) bowel movement
3. Hemorrhoidal suppositories with hydro-cortisone twice a day over 2 weeks.

What if an Anal Fissure does not heal?

A fissure that fails to respond to treatment should be re-examined to see if a definitive reason exists for the lack of healing. Such reasons can include scarring or muscle spasm of the internal anal sphincter muscle. Evidence is mounting that nitroglycerine (glyceryl trinitrate) applied topically to the anal sphincter reduces resting tone. Those which continue to cause pain and/or bleeding can be corrected by surgery.

Surgery

Surgery may consist of a small operation to remove the anal fissure and the underlying scar tissue. Cutting a portion of one of the anal muscles helps the tissue heal by preventing pain and spasm, which interferes with healing. Cutting this muscle rarely interferes with the ability to control bowel movements and can usually be performed without an overnight hospital stay. Complete healing occurs in a few weeks. Although pain often disappears after a few days. More than 90% of patients who require surgery for this problem have no further trouble from fissures.

Test Results and Advice Nurse

Please call the nurse for test results and advice: 863-4463

Appointments

Appointments can be made in person or by phone. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call and cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

To schedule or cancel appointments, call: 863-0774

For more information about health care issues, visit the UHS Web site at www.sa.psu.edu/uhs

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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