

Patient Educational Program

What You Should Know About Pilonidal Disease

WHAT IS PILONIDAL DISEASE?

Pilonidal disease is an infection of the skin in the region of the 'buttock crease'. It creates a cavity (cyst) below the skin surface that connects to the skin surface with one or more openings or tracts.

WHAT CAUSES PILONIDAL DISEASE?

The condition results from a reaction to hairs embedded in the skin, commonly occurring in the cleft between the buttocks.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms vary from a small dimple to a large painful mass. With infection, the area becomes red, tender, and the drainage will have a foul odor.

There are two patterns of this disease

1. A **Sudden Flare-up** resulting in tract formation that subsequently lays silent, and never bothers you again.
2. **Recurrent** episodes of swelling, pain, and drainage. As time goes on, the infections get more severe, and the cavity (cyst) grows.

HOW IS PILONIDAL DISEASE TREATED?

1. A **Sudden Flare-up** is managed with an incision to release the pus, and reduce the inflammation and pain. This procedure usually can be performed in the office with local anesthesia.
2. **Recurrent Disease** is treated with outpatient surgery. It is performed using a spinal anesthetic. Surgery has a 90% success rate.

DO I NEED SURGERY?

It is time to consider surgery when recurrent flare-ups are interfering with work or exercise. Procedures vary from unroofing the cavity to complete excision and possible closure using skin flaps. Your surgeon will discuss these options with you and help you select the appropriate operation.

What is involved with Surgery?

1. The first week after surgery is quite painful.
2. If the wound is left open, it will require dressings changes with packing to help it heal. The wound must heal from the 'inside-out'.
3. 90% of the wound heals in within the first several weeks. The final 10% can take months.
4. Although it takes longer to heal, the success rate with open wounds is higher.
5. Most patients are back to work within 2-4 weeks.

6. **Complications** of Pilonidal Surgery include, but are not limited to: infection, slow or non-healing wounds, recurrent cyst formation.

IS THERE LONG TERM CARE?

After healing, the skin in the buttocks crease must be kept clean and free of hair. This is accomplished by shaving or using a hair removal agent every 2 or 3 weeks until the age 30. After age 30, the risk of new disease decreases.

Return for exam in ____ weeks

- Re-evaluation
 Colonoscopy

- Flexible Sigmoidoscopy
 Follow-up only if symptoms persist

This fact sheet is for use by physicians only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. All specific medical questions or concerns should be presented to your own healthcare provider.