

Lateral sphincterotomy (repair of anal fissure)

This leaflet will explain what will happen when you come to the hospital for your operation. It is important that you understand what to expect and feel able to take an active role in your treatment. Your surgeon will have already discussed your treatment with you and will give advice about what to do when you get home.

What is an anal fissure?

An anal fissure often starts as a tear or crack in the skin lining the canal. This later becomes a type of ulcer. A fissure can cause pain on opening the bowels (and this pain can last up to several hours afterwards) and bleeding, often with blood on the toilet paper when you wipe, and sometimes irritation or itching around the anus. Some fissures heal on their own with no treatment, or just with a high fibre diet to keep the stools soft. Sometimes a fissure can cause chronic problems, with recurrent symptoms. It is not known what causes most fissures. Sometimes it is passing a hard stool due to constipation however many people with fissures will not have been constipated.

How will the operation help me?

Your surgeon has inspected your fissure and has recommended surgery. The lateral sphincterotomy operation cuts part of the internal muscle in the anal canal. This relieves the pain associated with a fissure and allows the fissure to heal. Healing will usually occur within 2-4 weeks. The operation is usually done under general anaesthetic (ie you are asleep) as a day case.

Are there alternatives to surgery?

Surgery is usually recommended only after non-surgical treatments (creams etc) have failed. An alternative surgical procedure is an injection of Botox to relax the sphincter muscle, plus an excision of the fissure to allow healing. Your surgeon will have discussed different treatment options with you before recommending surgery.

Are there likely to be any complications?

Usually after a lateral sphincterotomy, your fissure should heal within 2-4 weeks, and it is hoped that it will not return. However, we cannot guarantee that you will never get another fissure, and in a few cases they do return.

Occasionally, there is more difficulty in cleaning the anal area after a bowel movement following sphincterotomy. Moist toilet tissue may make this easier. A few people also experience difficulty in controlling wind (flatus). If either of these becomes a problem for you, please ask your doctor for advice.

Please discuss any questions or worries with your doctor or nurse – they will be happy to help.

What can I eat and drink before the operation?

You will be advised:

- To increase the amount of fibre in your diet. Fibre forms the structure of cereal, fruit and vegetables. It is not completely digested and absorbed by the body, so it provides bulk to the stools.
- If you drink alcohol, it is advisable to stop drinking the day before your operation.

After the operation

You may have a dressing around the entrance to the anus. Some discomfort is to be expected. Painkillers or local anaesthetic gel are available so please ask your nurse if you need something to help with discomfort.

You will be allowed a drink when you are fully awake and you can build up to a light diet when you feel able. You can get up as soon as you feel well enough but it is advisable to stay on the ward until the effects of the anaesthetic have completely worn off.

What happens after I am discharged?

The time taken to get back to normal activities varies, depending on the individual. Do as much as you feel comfortable doing.

- You should have a bath the day after your operation and this will soften and help removal of the dressing (it may need a little gentle pull). It is quite possible that you may bleed a little in the bath (do not be alarmed - this can make the water look very red).
- You will probably find that frequent baths are soothing to the area. It is important to keep the area clean.
- Try to take a bath or shower, or use the bidet after each time you open your bowels.
- You will probably notice a little blood on your stools or on the toilet paper, usually for 7-10 days after the operation. This is to be expected and is nothing to worry about.
- After a bowel motion women should remember to wipe front to back, away from the vaginal area.
- Once you are back to your normal life, we recommend taking a bath every time you open your bowels for at least 3-4 weeks after the operation if possible.
- You might find that sitting on the edge of the bath and using a shower attachment (if available) is a convenient way of cleaning the area.
- There are rarely any stitches that need taking out.
- It will be more comfortable for you to open your bowels if your stools are soft, so try to eat a diet high in fibre, and consider taking a mild laxative if your stools are hard.

- You may find that you have a minor mucus discharge from the anus for a few days after the operation. A small pad or panty liner will prevent any staining of your pants.

Work - you are likely to need 1-2 weeks off work, depending on the nature of your job. The ward staff can advise you and can supply you with a sick certificate to cover your hospital stay and convalescence. Your GP can then review your health and provide further certificates if required.

Driving - you will probably be fit to drive in a few days, providing you feel alert and can do an emergency stop comfortably. Please check with your motor insurance company before you start driving again. For the first couple of weeks you may find it uncomfortable to drive long distances.

Hospital follow-ups - are usually not necessary. Your GP will be sent a letter after you are discharged from hospital so that he/she has details of your operation and can help you with any future problems.

What to look out for

Contact your GP if you are concerned that the bleeding has not yet stopped, if the area around the anus becomes much more painful suddenly, or if you feel unwell.

Useful telephone numbers

Adult Day Surgery Unit	0118 322 7622
Heygroves ward	0118 322 7544
Pre-operative Assessment:	0118 322 6546
Trueta ward	0118 322 7541

If you have any concerns during the 24 hours following your discharge from hospital, please phone the ward to which you were admitted. After 24 hours; please seek advice from your GP.

More information

For more information about the Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk
www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Anal-fissure/Pages/Treatment.aspx

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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