



University of North Carolina Wilmington
Abrons Student Health Center

INSTRUCTION SHEET: PILONIDAL ABSCESS

The Student Health Provider has treated you today for a pilonidal abscess.

An abscess is a collection of pus, an infection caused by bacteria (germs). A pilonidal abscess is located at the top of the buttock crease.

Some people are born with a pilonidal sinus, a tiny sac located under the skin at the top of the buttock crease. The sinus has a small opening to the outside of the skin. If the sinus opening is blocked by hair, swelling, or skin debris, infection and an abscess can occur.

Symptoms include swelling, redness, and pain at the abscess site.

The key to initial treatment of the abscess is incision and drainage (a hole is made in the skin to let pus out). The incision and drainage is often painful, even though the skin over the abscess is numbed.

A piece of gauze or rubber tubing is often packed into the abscess cavity after the pus is drained. The packing is left in place one to two days to keep the abscess draining.

An abscess usually gets better quickly with drainage. Be aware, though, that the infection can spread and even affect the whole body. Symptoms such as fever and chills can occur. Serious infection is more likely in persons with diabetes, AIDS, chemotherapy treatment, or other conditions which limit the body's ability to fight infection.

Also, realize that incision and drainage treats the infection, but does not cure the cause. Recurrence of infection is common unless the sinus sac is removed at a later time.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR PILONIDAL ABSCESS:

1. Rest the affected area. Try to avoid sitting or lying directly on the site.
2. If an antibiotic is prescribed, take it as directed, until gone.
3. Over-the-counter pain medication can help relieve discomfort. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or naproxen can be taken, depending on individual preference.
4. Return to the Student Health Center or make a follow-up appointment with your personal/referral doctor as directed for removal of packing if it is used. After the packing is removed, begin soaking the abscess area in warm water three times a day for 20 to 30 minutes. If no packing is used, begin warm soaks promptly.
5. Schedule a "work-in" appointment with your personal/referral doctor, or return to the Student Health Center, several days after the packing is removed. The provider can make sure the infection is healing properly.
6. If your condition becomes worse, seek medical care *promptly*. Specifically, go to the closest emergency department or see your personal/referral doctor if the infected area increases in size, your overall condition becomes worse, or you develop whole-body symptoms. Whole-body symptoms include high fever (102 or greater) or hard shaking chills.
7. Schedule an appointment with a surgeon, once the infection is cured, for removal of the pilonidal sinus. The Student Health Center can assist you with this referral as needed.