Surgical Emergency Unit
Anorectal Abscess
Information for Patients
What is an anorectal abscess?
An anorectal abscess is a collection of pus that builds up in the rectum and anus. The rectum is the area of the large intestine where stools (faeces) are stored and the anus is the opening through which they are passed.

Anorectal abscesses can be caused by:
- A blocked gland.
- An infection of an anal fissure (a tear or ulcer in the lining of the anal canal).
- A sexually transmitted infection (STI).

People who are most susceptible to getting abscesses are:
- People with inflammatory bowel disease.
- People with diabetes.
- People with a weakened immune system.

With prompt treatment, people with this condition usually recover very well.

Complications tend to occur when treatment is delayed.

Signs and symptoms
- Painful, hardened tissue around the anus.
- Discharge of pus from the rectum.
- A lump or nodule at the edge of the anus.
- Tenderness at the edge of the anus.
- Fever.
- Constipation.
- Pain associated with bowel movements.
- Pain is usually constant, throbbing and worse when sitting down.
- Fatigue.
Treatment

- Surgery to drain the abscess which may be done under local or general anaesthetic depending upon the extent and location of the abscess. The wound is left open (there are no stitches) and the wound is packed with a dressing. This is the best way to heal the wound whilst reducing the risk of the abscess reforming.

- Medication for pain relief.

- Antibiotics are usually not necessary unless you are diabetic or have problems fighting infection.

- Stool softeners to ensure that you do not get constipated.

Recovery

Below is advice to help you recover as quickly as possible.

You may experience a sore throat following surgery if you had a general anaesthetic, this should resolve in a few days.

Pain killers will be given to you whilst on the ward and you will be given some to take home. Your nurse or pharmacist will explain how and when to take them and there are instructions on the box to remind you. The main side effects from painkillers are drowsiness so you are advised not to drive or operate machinery if affected. You may become constipated for which you are advised to eat a high fibre diet and drink plenty of fluids; avoiding drinks containing alcohol and caffeine.

If taking prescribed antibiotics you must continue to take them until the course is finished even if you are feeling well. Avoid alcohol whilst on antibiotics and take additional precautions if you are taking the contraceptive pill as it may be less effective whilst taking antibiotics.

Wear cotton underwear and loose fitting garments to avoid sweating and friction. You will need to wear an absorbent pad
until the wound stops flowing to protect your clothes.

Do not rub the skin with soap or a rough flannel, just bathe the area with plain water. You can take a bath or shower. Dab the area dry.

If your wound has a dressing on when you go home you will need to arrange to go to the practice nurse at your GP surgery to have this changed. The nurse will discuss with you how often you need to return for a dressing change. You are advised to take painkillers about 20-30 minutes prior to having your dressing done as it may be painful.

Do not use any creams or ointments on the wound unless specifically prescribed by your doctor.

If the type of discharge on the pad changes from watery and blood stained to thicker and yellow or if it becomes more painful, speak to your GP or practice nurse.

It is important that you do not get constipated after this type of surgery as this would be very painful. Take any medication you are prescribed to soften your stool, eat a high fibre diet and drink plenty of fluids to maintain regular bowel motions.

The amount of time you need off work depends upon the type of work you do and the extent of your surgery.

If you have any further questions please ask your nurse or your GP if you are back at home.
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If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221473 or email PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk