

Recovering after your anal fistula operation

This leaflet answers some of the questions you may have following your anal fistula operation. We hope you will find this information helpful in your recovery over the next few weeks.

Leaving hospital

If you have had your operation in the Day Surgery Unit (DSU), you will be able to leave hospital on the same day as your operation. You will need a friend or family member to travel home and stay with you for at least 24 hours after your surgery. It is important that you rest for the remainder of the day. Please read our leaflet, **Surgical Admissions Lounges and Day Surgery Units at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals** for more information. If you have not received a copy, please ask the staff caring for you for one.

If you need to stay in hospital following your operation, you will have received the leaflet **Preparing for your stay at Guy's and St Thomas'**, which provides advice on how to prepare for an overnight stay in hospital. Your doctor or nurse will tell you when you will be able to leave hospital.

Will I have a dressing?

You may have a dressing over your wound. If you do, please remove this in a bath the day after your surgery. You may need to give the dressing a gentle pull to take it off. It is possible that your wound will bleed, so do not be alarmed if this happens. If you are concerned about the amount of bleeding, please do not hesitate to contact us. Contact details can be found at the end of this leaflet.

Your surgeon may ask you to 'digitate' your wound. This involves running a finger along your wound to prevent the top layer of skin from healing too quickly. This may be uncomfortable but can help to prevent your fistula from recurring. If you do not wish to do this yourself or cannot reach the area, you will need to arrange for your practice nurse to do this each day.

A seton is a thread that is inserted through the fistula tract, out of the bottom and then tied in a knot outside. This allows the infection to drain and heal, without damaging your sphincter muscles. If you have had a seton stitch inserted, you may find that some mucus (thick, slippery fluid) leaks out of the wound. This is normal. You may wish to wear a pad in your underwear and bathe more often, as the mucus can cause the surrounding area to become sore and itchy.

Your nurse will write specific instructions about your wound in the space on page 4.

My operation involved:

- ☐ **laying open the fistula, or**
☐ **inserting a seton**

Special instructions for me are:

Will I have any pain?

As with all surgery, you should expect some discomfort. It can be quite painful for the first couple of days and it may seem like it gets worse before it starts to feel more comfortable again, but the pain will ease.

When you leave the ward or DSU we may give you the following to take home with you:

- **Painkillers.** It is important that you take your prescribed painkillers regularly to keep you as comfortable as possible. However, the tablets are not compulsory and if you have little pain you may not need to take them. Always follow the instructions on the packet and never take more than the recommended dose.
- **Antibiotics.** We may give you a course of antibiotics to prevent infection and reduce your pain. If we give you a type of antibiotics called metronidazole, you must not drink alcohol while you are taking the tablets or for 48 hours after you have finished the course. Mixed with alcohol, these tablets can cause unpleasant reactions such as nausea, vomiting, flushing of the face, headaches and palpitations. . You can safely drink alcohol again 48 hours after this treatment is over. Always complete the prescribed course of any antibiotics. Please make sure that you have told the doctor if you are allergic to any antibiotics and always ask if you are unsure about any of your medicines.
- **Laxatives.** These medicines will encourage bowel movement and help to keep your stool soft after the operation. You may not need to take laxatives after your operation – your surgeon will decide what is appropriate for you.

What should I expect when I go to the toilet?

You may have some discomfort and a little bleeding the first time you open your bowels. However, you should open them normally after the operation when you get the urge to do so. It is a good idea to take a dose of your painkillers about 15 – 20 minutes before you open your bowels, to reduce the discomfort.

Keeping the wound site clean

It is important to keep the area of the operation clean and we recommend that you gently bathe your wound in a warm bath each day, if possible. This may also help with your pain. Do not use soap, or put salt or any perfumed products in the water until your wound has healed, as these could irritate your wound site.

If you can, try to wash the area or use alcohol-free wet wipes to clean it after each bowel movement.

When can I return to work and normal activities?

Most people take a few days off work, but this depends on how you feel and how active your job is. Do as much as you feel able to, but avoid any strenuous activity such as lifting, exercise or running during the first week or so. You should not go swimming until your wound has healed. You can have sex as soon as you feel comfortable.

Will my anal fistula return?

Anal fistulas can be complex problems to treat and heal. This is why it is important that you attend your follow-up appointment, which is usually about eight weeks after your surgery. At this appointment, the specialist will check your wound and/or seton stitch, and will discuss with you whether you need further surgery.

If you have not received your appointment within two to three weeks of your surgery, please call the **Surgical Access Team on 020 7188 8875** to book an appointment.

Who should I contact if I have any questions or concerns?

You can contact Fiona Hibberts, consultant nurse – colorectal, with any questions or concerns on:

Tel: 020 7188 2568 or secretary 020 7188 6475

Email: fiona.hibberts@gstt.nhs.uk

If you experience persistent bleeding from your wound, you can contact the ward or department where you were treated by calling the switchboard on 020 7188 7188. Out of hours you should contact your GP or local A&E department.

If you feel generally unwell or experience a fever (temperature), you should see your GP or go to your local A&E department. Your follow-up appointment can also be brought forward if necessary.

Further information

CORE is a charity offering information on digestive disorders and bowel problems, such as Crohn's disease and irritable bowel syndrome.

Tel: 020 7486 0341

Email: info@corecharity.org.uk

Website: www.digestivedisorders.org.uk

Contact us

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

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