

My PILONIDAL SINUS

WHAT'S A PILONIDAL SINUS?

'Pilonidal' is a word that means 'nest of hairs', and as such a 'pilonidal sinus' is a tunnel in the skin and underlying tissue that contains a bunch of hairs. The opening of a pilonidal sinus is usually found near the anus or between the buttocks (a.k.a. the natal cleft—see the picture below). There can be more than one opening at a time.

WHAT CAUSES A PILONIDAL SINUS?

Although the cause of pilonidal sinus wounds is not known for sure, *the following risk factors have been identified:*

- Male gender - men are four times as likely as women to develop a pilonidal sinus;
- Being younger than 40;
- Having a job that involves a lot of sitting;
- Being obese;
- Having a previous injury or ongoing irritation to the affected area;
- Having a family history of the condition, and/or;
- Having a hairy, deep natal cleft.



WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT ANOTHER PILONIDAL SINUS?

If you have had a pilonidal sinus in the past that has closed, *you can prevent another from happening by:*

- Showering or bathing at least daily and more often if you area sweating, making sure to gently pat dry the area between your buttocks (don't aggressively rub the area dry with your towel);
- Keeping the area free of hair by shaving regularly or by having laser hair removal;
- Avoiding friction to the area;
- Getting to and/or maintaining an ideal body weight, and by;
- Avoiding sitting in one position for long periods of time.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

As a person with a pilonidal sinus wound or at risk for another pilonidal sinus wound, you should be regularly visiting your doctor. *At these visits you should be asking:*

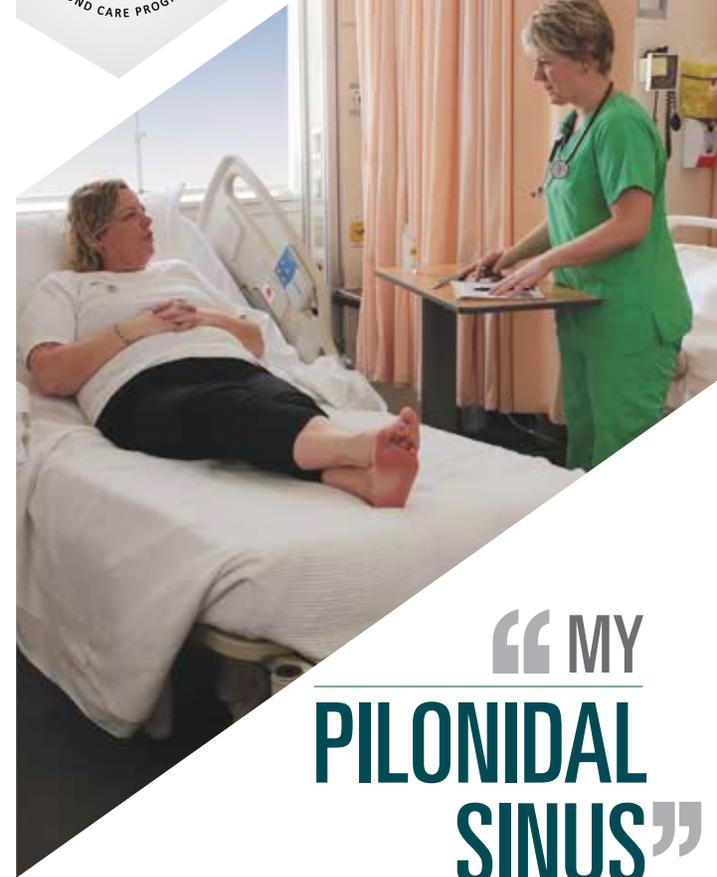
- Am I at an ideal body weight, and if not, what can I do to get there?
- Can you help me to stop or reduce smoking/drinking alcohol?
- Are my blood sugars well enough controlled to allow my wound to heal (if you have diabetes)?
- Should I be seen by a surgeon to have the sinus cut out (if this is your second or subsequent pilonidal sinus)?
- How can I have more regular soft bowel movements?

For more information on pilonidal sinus wounds, nutrition, wound healing, and for community resources, go to:

swrwoundcareprogram.ca



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“MY
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SINUS”

Tips on how to care for your or your loved one's pilonidal sinus wound





COMMON QUESTIONS

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF A PILONIDAL SINUS?

A pilonidal sinus often appears as a 'lump' near the anus or between the buttocks, that:

- Swells;
- Becomes painful, and/or;
- Breaks open and leaks blood and/or pus.

If left untreated a pilonidal sinus that has broken open may close back over on its own and the swelling may go down. However in most cases this area will re-swell, become painful, and leak once again.

WHAT'S THE TREATMENT FOR
A PILONIDAL SINUS?

The first time you go to the emergency room with a pilonidal sinus, the doctor may cut the area open to let the drainage and infection out. The wound would then be cleaned, packed with gauze, and covered with a dressing. The wound would require regular dressing changes until it closes. You may also be started on antibiotics to help treat the infection (take them ALL even if you are feeling better).

If the wound does not close or if you end up with another pilonidal sinus, your doctor may send you to a surgeon who may:

- Cut out the sinus and an area of tissue around the sinus, leaving the wound open to heal from the bottom up. This involves regular dressing changes until the wound has closed, but the chance of your pilonidal sinus coming back is less, or;

- Cut out the sinus and then pull the edges of the wound together, stitching it closed. This allow the wound to heal quicker, but sometimes the edges split open and then the wound must be left to heal from the bottom up.

Sometimes your doctor may suggest a Sitz bath for comfort. You can buy Sitz bath kits from your local pharmacy. Sitz baths should be used AFTER bowel movements. You should remove your dressing before the procedure, and use clean tap water every time. You should not sit any longer than five minutes in a Sitz bath, and although your wound may seem clean, you should always clean your wound as instructed by your nurse once you have finished your Sitz bath, before applying a new dressing.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

You are an important member of your wound care team.
To help close your pilonidal sinus wound:

- Keep your dressing clean and dry. Never leave the wound open to air;
- Change your dressing as instructed and as needed if it becomes soiled, leaks through, or falls off. If you or a family member, friend, or neighbor is able to change the dressing, you will be taught;
- Recognize the signs of wound infection and get help right away. Signs of infection include: redness/heat/swelling, increased drainage, foul green or pus drainage, increased or new pain, and/or fever (38°C);

- Stop smoking;
- Eat a well-balanced diet;
- Take your medications as instructed by your doctor;
- Keep your blood sugars in good control (if you have diabetes);
- Get to and/or maintain a healthy weight;
- Shower or bathe daily and more often if you are sweating (and after bowel movements), making sure to gently pat the area dry (don't aggressively rub the area dry). NOTE: Remove the dressing before showering, clean the area using your hand held shower head, and then clean and apply a new dressing to the wound immediately after;
- Avoid letting soap, shampoo, and loose hair into the wound during showering;
- Carry baby wipes to clean the area after bowel movements when you are away from home;
- Keep the area free of hair. Have someone shave around your wound once or twice a week. Razors made for bikini shaves work best;
- Avoid friction to the area;
- Exercise and/or play sports in moderation. If you wound starts to bleed during your exercise, stop and re-start exercise/sports gradually at another time (avoid running and bicycling);
- Eat plenty of fiber to keep your bowels regular (fruit, vegetables, whole grains, beans), and drink plenty of water;
- Avoid foods that cause diarrhea;
- Wear cotton boxer shorts or underwear (not nylon, synthetics, or thongs), and;
- Avoid tight pants and keep your belt off the affected area.