

Pilonidal Sinus Disease (PSD)

Information and advice for patients

Skin Laser Centre - Dermatology

What is the condition?

A pilonidal sinus is a small hole or tunnel in the skin at the top of the buttocks, where they divide (the cleft). Pilonidal comes from the Latin word Pilus meaning hair, and nidus meaning nest: the nest of hairs formed under the skin in the gluteal region. It does not always cause symptoms and only needs to be treated if it becomes infected. Approximately 26 people in 100,000, in the UK suffer from Pilonidal Sinus Disease, with 3 times more men than women developing the disease. The impact of the condition can vary between different people. Some experience mild discomfort, other individuals require time off work or school and are not able to perform daily tasks. This is due to abscess formation and the need for repeated surgical procedures with a long recovery time.

What causes it?

It is not possible to say exactly what causes a pilonidal sinus. A skin problem, pressure or friction may cause hair between the buttocks to be pushed inwards. This hair can be growing around the buttock area, or can be loose hair shed from elsewhere that gathers around the buttocks and natal cleft, and enters the pilonidal sinus.

The chance of developing pilonidal sinus disease (PSD) is higher if:

- You are male (men are more likely to suffer with the condition than women).
- You have a Job that requires long periods sitting, for example office jobs or driving jobs.
- You have a family history of pilonidal sinus disease.
- You are overweight.
- You have lots of body hair, especially if it is thick or coarse.
- Wearing tight clothing that presses on the tail bone area. This can add pressure to the area which may increase risk.
- If you are born with a pit or dimple in the natal cleft area.

What are the symptoms?

Pilonidal Sinus Disease may present as an asymptomatic, acute, chronic or a recurrent condition.

Asymptomatic PSD

This presents as a small swelling or with small pits in the natal cleft area, but with no other symptoms. Treatment would include monitoring the area to see if it gets better or worse, and following a strict personal hygiene routine. It is important that you do not shave the buttocks or natal cleft, as the cut ends of the hair may be sharp and penetrate the skin.

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Acute PSD

The abscess has continued to swell, and you will be in discomfort or pain. Treatment requires an incision and drainage procedure. Following this, a course of pain relief or antibiotics may also be needed. The wound may require daily dressings, and removal of all dead hair and debris from the cavity, until healed.

Chronic/recurrent PSD

Sometimes the cavity can appear healed, but the abscess is still active under the skin. It reappears and discharges from time to time requiring more treatment.

How can the condition be prevented?

Pilonidal sinus wounds are often recurrent with delayed healing due to a number of factors including:

- Poor local hygiene
- Incomplete or traumatic hair removal (such as waxing/plucking)
- Inadequate pain control
- Chronic low-grade superficial and or deep surrounding tissue infection
- Excessive local perspiration, friction, and chaffing

We have compiled a list of basic instructions for you to follow to help with your wound healing and pilonidal sinus disease improvement:

- Please shower or cleanse after each bowel movement. If showering is not possible, please ensure that you use a moist flushable toilet wipe after using the toilet. These can be purchased from any supermarket and can be flushed down the toilet.
- If you are wearing a dressing, it should be kept clean and dry at ALL times. The dressing should be changed immediately if it becomes soiled or damp, as faecal contamination of the dressing and wound can contribute to delayed wound healing. A soiled dressing should be removed before you shower or bathe.
- Please ensure that you are showering or bathing (AT LEAST once) daily and that you are allowing your buttocks /natal cleft to be thoroughly cleaned and dried. If you are wearing a dressing and it is not changed daily please ensure you shower on the day that it is changed.
- Please ensure that your underwear is changed daily and that your underwear is 100% cotton, to ensure that the buttocks and natal cleft are ventilated.

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- When washing your head hair, please try to ensure that any hair that falls out is removed from between the buttocks, and so does not sit in the wound. You could try aiming the shower head at the buttocks.
- If you have a wound that is open or oozing you should have a salt bath (table salt) once a week.
- Clothing you wear can help or hinder wound improvement - please ensure that you wear loose fitting clothing around the hips and buttocks, and avoid tight fitting clothing such as sportswear, for example, tight leggings or cycling shorts, women's tights etc.
- Ensure that you drink lots of water, and eat well including, lots of fruit and vegetables to prevent constipation and therefore avoid putting any pressure on the incision site or wound.
- If you attend your appointment and hygiene standards are not met, we reserve the right to postpone your treatment.

Contact details

Skin Laser Centre

Monday – Friday 8.30am – 3.45pm

0121 507 6639

swbh.dermlaser@nhs.net

Further information

NHS website

Pilonidal sinus

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pilonidal-sinus/>

KidsHealth

Pilonidal cyst

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/pilonidal-cyst.html?ref=search>

(Websites accessed 14 February 2024).

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Sources used for the information in this leaflet

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Endoscopic ablation for a pilonidal sinus. Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ipg646/informationforpublic>. [Accessed 14th February 2024].

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Incorporating City, Sandwell and Rowley Regis Hospitals
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ML6470

Issue Date: March 2024

Review Date: March 2027