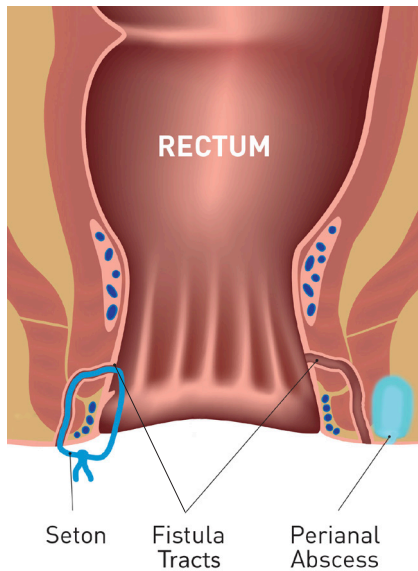

Patient Information on peri-anal abscess and seton insertion in Crohns' Disease

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What is a peri-anal abscess?

A peri-anal abscess is a collection of pus which is located near the anus (back passage). Crohn's Disease is as a result of chronic inflammation which has caused erosion through the bowel wall resulting in an abscess. The abscess and the inflammation caused by Crohn's Disease may also causes fistulae to occur.



What is a fistula?

A fistula is a result of the abscess and infection. It is a tract which develops from the thinning bowel wall as a result of inflammation caused by Crohn's Disease. Faeces from the bowel leaks into the tract and pushes through to the skin near the anus. There are different types of fistulae; some are a single tract which runs from the rectum through to the outside via the skin. Others are more complex and have multiple tracts and may cross the muscles near the back passage. Damage to these muscles may cause problems with control of bowel movement which may result with incontinence.

What is the treatment of an abscess?

An abscess needs to be treated by a surgeon who will drain the abscess in the operating theatre under general anaesthetic. To ensure complete drainage of the abscess the surgeon may insert a seton.

What is a seton?

A seton is a thin silicone string which looks like an elastic band. This is inserted during an examination under anaesthetic into the tract of the fistula and this allows drainage of the abscess. It is tied in a small knot at the outside of your body. More than one seton may be required depending on the number of tracts. Setons can be left in place for months or longer if required.

Care of a seton following insertion

A seton will drain for a number of weeks following insertion and you may need to wear a small pad in your underwear. The discharge may cause skin irritation and itch so extra hygiene is advised. Shower the area and pat dry 3 to 4 times daily. A barrier cream may be recommended which will ease the irritation and itch.

Following initial insertion the area may be uncomfortable or even painful. Mild analgesia will be advised prior to discharge and should be adequate to relieve the pain. The nursing staff will advise you prior to discharge.

Going to the toilet may be uncomfortable and may cause a little bleeding the first time you have a bowel motion. Laxatives may be recommended by your consultant.

Returning to work will depend on how you feel and what job is. Usually five days off work is adequate.

It is advisable to avoid strenuous activities such as lifting, exercise of running. Swimming should be avoided until after the wound area has healed. Sexual activity can resume when you feel comfortable. The advisable time is two weeks for resuming these activities.

What are the symptoms of an abscess/fistula?

Symptoms include:

- Pus from near the back passage (anus)
- Bleeding in or near the anus
- Irritation of the skin around the anus
- A small opening or a noticeable hole near the anus
- A swelling or a hard red area which is leaking pus
- Pain around and near anus which may be throbbing

You are advised to contact your GP directly or phone the unit/centre where you had the procedure for advice if you experience any of the following:

Excessive pain, continuous bleeding, the seton is displaced or falls out, high temperature, unusual and offensive discharge.

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