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Colon & Rectal Surgery

## Anal Fissure

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### What is an anal fissure?

An anal fissure is a small tear in the lining of the anus. This tear can cause pain, bleeding and/or itching.

### What causes an anal fissure?

A hard, dry bowel movement can cause a tear in the anal lining, resulting in a fissure. Other causes include diarrhea and inflammation of the anal-rectal area.

### How can a fissure be treated?

Fortunately, at least 50% of fissures heal either by themselves or without the need for surgery. Here are some non-surgical ways to treat fissures:

- Apply special medicated cream
- Take stool softeners
- Avoid being constipated
- Use sitz baths in which you soak the anal area in plain warm water for 20 minutes several times a day

### What can be done if a fissure doesn't heal?

A fissure that won't heal should be re-examined to determine if a definite reason can be found for why it won't heal. Such reasons include scarring or muscle spasms of the internal anal sphincter muscle. Fissures that continue to cause pain and/or bleeding can be corrected by surgery.

### What does surgery involve?

Surgery may consist of a small operation to remove the fissure and the underlying scar tissue. Cutting a portion of one of the anal muscles helps the fissure heal by preventing pain and spasm, both of which interfere with healing. Cutting this muscle rarely affects the ability to control bowel movements and usually can be performed without an overnight hospital stay.

### How long does the healing process take after surgery?

Complete healing occurs in a few weeks, even though pain often disappears after a few days.

### Will the problem return?

More than 90% of patients who require surgery for this problem have no further trouble with fissures.

### Can fissures lead to colon cancer?

No! Persistent symptoms need careful evaluation, however, as conditions other than fissures can cause similar symptoms.

*Excerpted with permission from the American Society of Colon & Rectal Surgeons*