



Pilonidal Cyst

Introduction

A pilonidal cyst is a hollow space or cavity located by the tailbone in the area of the buttock crease. (See Figure 1.) Body hairs enter the space through a pit or opening in the skin in the buttock crease. (See Figure 2.) As the hair continues to collect, the cavity can get irritated and inflamed and may become infected. This is called a pilonidal abscess. (See Figure 3.)

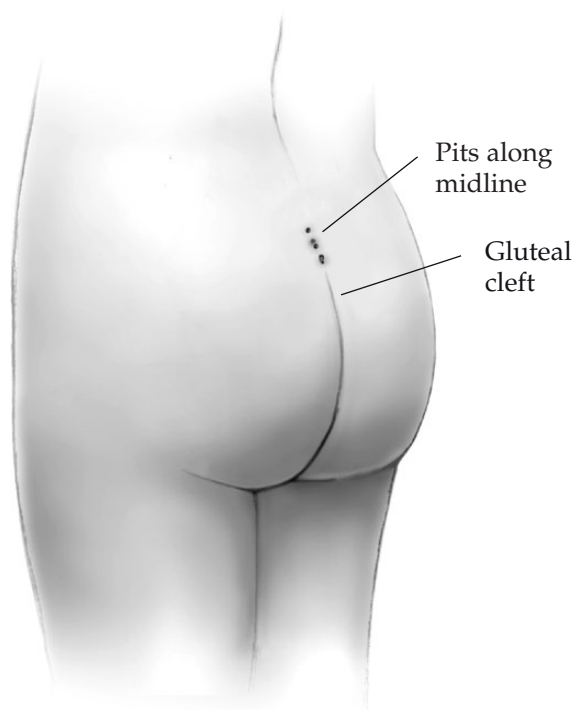


Figure 1. Pilonidal dimples (pits)

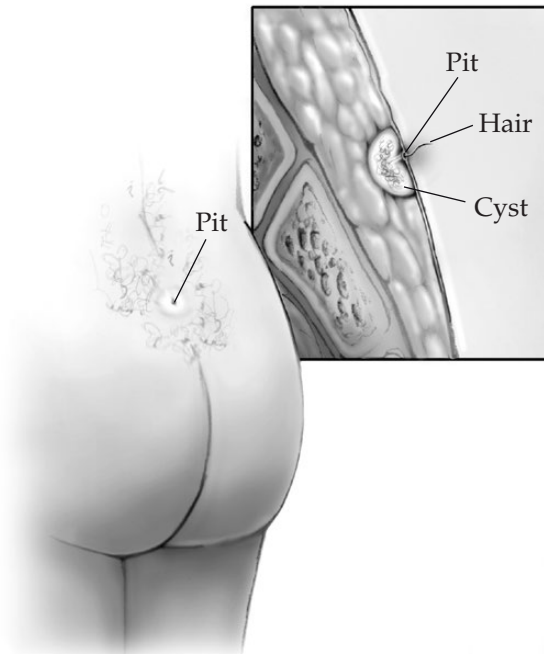
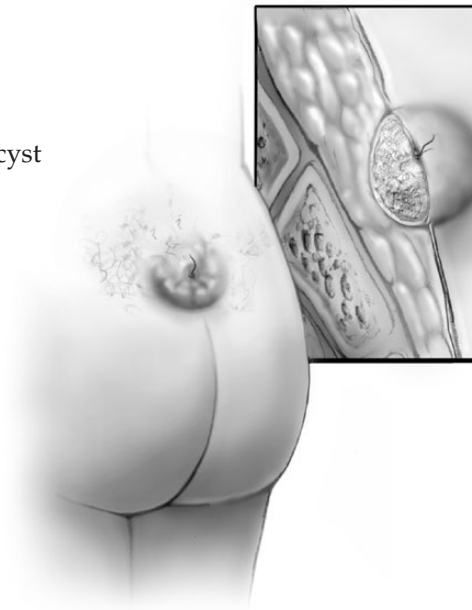


Figure 2. Pilonidal cyst

Figure 3. Infected pilonidal cyst
(pilonidal abscess)

Although not everything about pilonidal cysts is understood, there are several well-known factors. A pilonidal cyst begins with hair on the outside working its way inside. Pilonidal cysts are more common in men who have more body hair and people who sit for prolonged periods of time on their job. There is no relation between a pilonidal cyst and a person's spine.

Symptoms of Pilonidal Cyst

Many people may have pilonidal pits and never know it. (See Figure 1.) The first sign of a pilonidal cyst may be a slight lump that can be felt at the tailbone in the area of the buttock crease. Most people discover this lump while washing the area during a shower.

If the pilonidal cyst becomes larger and inflamed, there will be pain in the area of the tailbone that is worse with sitting. If your pilonidal cyst becomes infected, you may have increased pain, and you may see bloody or yellowish drainage on your underclothes that is often sticky and foul smelling.

See your physician if you have any signs or symptoms of pilonidal cyst so that a plan for treatment and future prevention can be created for you.

Treatment of Pilonidal Cyst

Your physician may want to immediately open and drain your pilonidal cyst if it is infected, or do so at a later time during an outpatient procedure. Either way, you will be given a local anesthetic to numb the area before it is opened and drained.

The contents of your cyst depend on the degree of irritation or infection present. A pilonidal cyst which is merely a lump, without irritation or pain, will consist of hair. A cyst that is painful, irritated or infected will contain hair plus blood and clear or yellowish fluid which may or may not have a foul odor.

Because every pilonidal cyst is unique to the person affected, a variety of methods have been developed to treat pilonidal cyst. First-time abscesses may need only simple opening and drainage, while recurrent infections may require more extensive surgery. Your physician will use a method that is best to treat your pilonidal cyst.

Wound Care Following Incision and Drainage

After a drainage procedure for pilonidal abscess, your physician most likely will pack the wound so that it can heal from the inside out. (See Figure 4.) After an elective procedure for pilonidal cysts that are not inflamed, the surgeon may close the incision with stitches.

Wound care treatment is extremely important, and your commitment to wound care is essential. Your physician and nurse will thoroughly educate you about how to change your packing and perform wet-to-dry dressings that are done two to three times a day for several weeks. These dressings support a process called granulation, which helps to form new and healthy tissue from the inside out.

The best method for daily cleansing is to shower. While you are in the shower, direct the water onto your tailbone to completely remove any soapy residue. Washing **gently** with a washcloth will help keep the wound free of hair accumulation. Glycerin soap is recommended because it is the least irritating. Thoroughly dry the area after showering.

Do not sit in hot tubs or whirlpools, or take baths when you have a fresh incision or open wound. Soaking can macerate the skin and worsen your pilonidal cyst.



Figure 4

Bleeding and infection are the two most common complications after a pilonidal cyst has been opened and drained. While doing your dressing changes, you may notice some oozing of blood or clear fluid. This is normal. However, it is not normal to have persistent bleeding that requires more than two to three dressing changes each day or drainage that is foul smelling.

When to seek medical help

If you experience any of the following symptoms, call _____ and ask to speak to your health-care provider or go to an emergency room.

- Have persistent bleeding from the wound.
- Have foul-smelling drainage from the wound.
- Develop a temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) or greater.

Medications

Your physician may prescribe an antibiotic. You may take your usual medications unless instructed otherwise by your physician.

Activity

Return to your regular activities when you feel able to do so unless your physician tells you otherwise. It is important to keep the area clean and dry, especially after exercising.

Diet

If obesity has contributed to your pilonidal cyst, your physician may prescribe a weight reduction diet or have you speak with a registered dietitian.

Follow-Up Appointment

This material is for your education and information only. This content does not replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. New medical research may change this information. If you have questions about a medical condition, always talk with your health care provider.