

What is an anal fissure?

An anal fissure is a tear in the lining of the anus. These tears are often caused by trauma. Contributing factors include passing large or hard stools, constipation or straining during bowel movements, childbirth, long-lasting diarrhea, a tightened anal sphincter (the ring of muscles at the opening of the anus), or inflammation (e.g., as in Crohn's disease).

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of an anal fissure include pain during bowel movements, which can sometimes be severe and feel like a burning sensation. You may experience pain for a few hours after bowel movements. You might also notice bleeding after a bowel movement, which will show as bright red blood on the stool or on toilet paper after wiping. Your anus may feel itchy or irritated.

When should you see the doctor?

It is important to see your doctor if you have pain during bowel movements or blood on your stools or toilet paper. Bleeding can also be a sign of more serious disease. Anal fissures are usually visible so your doctor can often make a diagnosis during your visit.

What treatments help heal an anal fissure?

Anal fissures often heal within a few weeks with measures to soften stools. Increase your fibre intake (eat more fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains) and drink plenty of fluids. You can help relax the anal sphincter by taking warm sitz baths (i.e., soaking in plain warm water for 10 to 20 minutes several times a day).

What if my anal fissure does not heal?

If your anal fissure does not heal after taking steps to soften your stools, see your doctor again. Your doctor can prescribe some ointments, such as nitroglycerin or a calcium channel blocker (e.g., diltiazem), to help promote healing. If your anal fissure does not heal after these treatments, follow up with your doctor who can refer you to a specialist.

Sources:

- 1) Mount Sinai Hospital. Patient Care. *Anal Fissure*. <http://www.mountsinai.org/patient-care/health-library/diseases-and-conditions/anal-fissure>.
- 2) Mayo Clinic. Patient Care & Health Info. *Anal Fissure*. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/anal-fissure/basics/definition/con-20024998>.

