

An anal fistula is a small tract or tunnel near the anal canal that connects the rectum to the perianal skin. A fistula can result in discharge, pain, or recurrent infections. Fistulas often need several procedures to get on top of things, and, as a result, there are several methods of fistula treatment. These typically include the insertion of a seton drain, fistulotomy, fibrin plug, LIFT procedure or rectal advancement flap.

Expected Postoperative Effects:

- You will very likely experience pain and discomfort following this procedure. For this, you will be prescribed pain medication. This pain can persist for 2-4 weeks while the inflammation settles.
- The area will be somewhat inflamed for the first 2-4 weeks, which may cause concern that the procedure was unsuccessful. Given regular use of salt-water baths and the cream prescribed postoperatively, this inflammation will settle within 3-4 weeks.
- You may also experience discharge, itchiness and some bleeding during the first 1-2 weeks.

To ease these postoperative symptoms, we would recommend taking regular sitz baths/warm salt baths, taking pain relief as required, utilising any topical ointments as prescribed, staying hydrated and eating a high fibre diet, and taking stool softeners to avoid constipation.

Returning to work and activities:

- Most patients require at least 1-2 weeks off from work following the procedure, however, as full recovery extends for 3 months, you may feel you require additional time off. Our office can provide a medical certificate if required.
- You will need to avoid constipation by maintaining a high fibre diet and increasing your water intake. You can take stool softeners or laxatives such as Movicol or Metamucil, as needed. You should avoid straining when passing bowel movements and limit toileting time to 1-3 minutes.
- You should ensure you stay hydrated with 8-10 glasses of liquid per day.
- You should avoid heavy lifting and strenuous activity for 6-8 weeks. You can gradually increase the weight you lift each week, with max 1kg during the first week, 2kg in the second week, and so on.
- You should avoid swimming for 2-4 weeks.
- You can gradually reintroduce gentle aerobic exercise from 3-4 weeks.
- Do not drink alcohol, drive, operate heavy machinery, or sign legal documents for at least 24-48 hours, or while on pain medication.

Wound Care:

- You may have a gauze or bandage over the opening of the fistula to absorb drainage, as the area heals.

- If it was necessary during your procedure, you may have a string in the area of the fistula called a seton drain.
- After a bowel movement, use wet-wipes or take a shower or sitz bath to clean the area.

Follow-Up Appointment:

You should call the office on 1300 008 883 to arrange a postoperative appointment with Dr Urquhart. This should be made within 4-8 weeks.

If a seton has been placed, Dr Urquhart will arrange a follow up procedure to review this within 2-4 weeks following the initial procedure.

Contact the rooms if you experience any of the following:

- Persistent and increasing pain
- Increasing abdominal or groin swelling
- Fever, chills, or high temperature
- Swelling, redness, bleeding or foul-smelling drainage from the wound
- Persistent nausea or vomiting
- Difficulty passing urine or bowel movements

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the clinic on 1300 008 883. If you begin to feel unwell after hours, please contact the after-hours nurse at St Vincent's Hospital, or present to your nearest emergency department.