

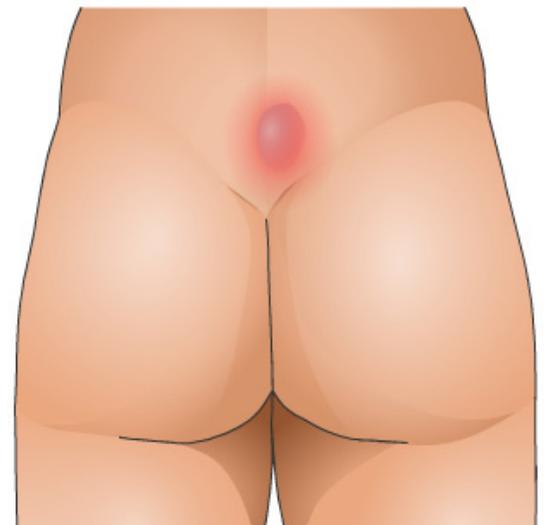
Introduction

A cyst is an abnormal pocket of pus or fluid. A pilonidal cyst forms near the tailbone at the top of the crease of the buttocks. The tailbone is the small bone at the bottom of your backbone, or spine. Sometimes a pilonidal cyst may become infected and can be painful. A cyst may need to be drained or removed surgically.

This reference summary explains pilonidal cyst. It covers symptoms and causes of pilonidal cysts, as well as diagnosis and treatment options.

What Is a Pilonidal Cyst?

A pilonidal cyst is an abnormal pocket of skin that forms near the tailbone. It often forms above the crease of the buttocks. The cyst often contains skin debris, or waste, as well as hair. If the cyst becomes infected, it may contain pus. If a pilonidal cyst becomes infected, it is called a pilonidal abscess. It can be painful. As the infection gets worse, a pilonidal abscess can sometimes form spaces beneath the skin with one or more openings. These spaces are called sinuses, or sinus tracts.



Pilonidal Cyst

Anyone can get a pilonidal cyst. But pilonidal cysts most commonly affect young men. They frequently happen between puberty and age 40.

Some people are at increased risk of having a pilonidal cyst. This includes people who:

- Are overweight or obese.
- Have thick, stiff body hair.
- Sit for long periods of time, such as truck drivers.

Even after a pilonidal cyst has gone away, it can form again. This can make treatment difficult.

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Symptoms

In some cases, a pilonidal cyst may not cause any symptoms. Often symptoms happen when a cyst becomes infected. A pilonidal cyst may look like a pit or small depression at the top of the buttocks crease. It may also look like a large pimple. Pilonidal cysts may cause pain at the bottom of the spine, near the tailbone.

Other symptoms of a pilonidal cyst can be signs of an infection, including:

- Fever.
- Foul-smelling drainage from the cyst.
- Pus or blood draining from the cyst.
- Redness and swelling near the tailbone.

If you have these or other symptoms, talk to your health care provider. Your health care provider will help determine the cause of your symptoms.



Causes

It is not known for sure what causes pilonidal cysts. But there are many possible causes. Pilonidal cysts may be caused by loose hairs. These loose hairs can penetrate the skin. Friction and pressure can force the loose hairs to press into the skin. Then the body may create a cyst around the hair.

Some causes of friction and pressure are:

- Long periods of sitting.
- Skin rubbing against skin.
- Wearing tight clothing.

Another possible cause of pilonidal cysts is stretching deep skin layers. This may cause a hair follicle to break open. Hair follicles are the structures that hairs grow from. A cyst can then form around the ruptured follicle. It is also possible that a person may be born with the cyst.



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Trauma to the tailbone region of the body can cause pilonidal cysts. During World War II, many soldiers developed pilonidal cysts. It was thought that the cysts were due to trauma from riding in bumpy Jeeps. The condition was called "Jeep disease."

Other possible risk factors of pilonidal cysts are:

- Depth and shape of the area above the buttocks.
- Development problems in the womb before birth.
- Family history of pilonidal cysts.
- History of blocked hair follicles or skin problems.



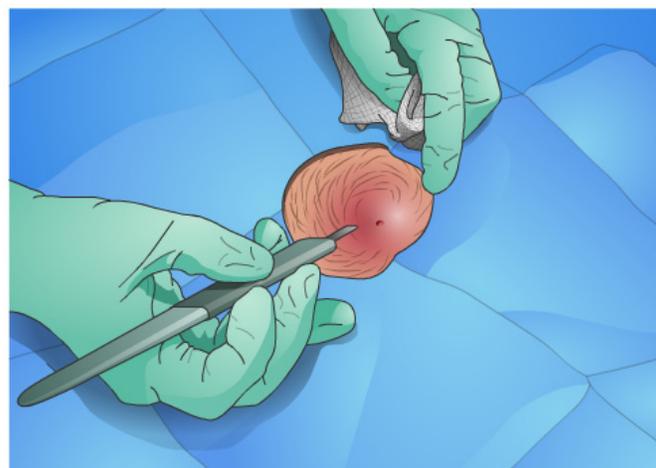
Diagnosis

Your health care provider will first ask about your medical history and symptoms. A physical exam will be done. During the physical exam, your health care provider will look at the cyst. Often this is all that is needed to make a diagnosis. Your health care provider will tell you if you need any additional tests. Tests may be done to rule out other conditions.

Treatment

In some cases, treatment may not be needed. If a pilonidal cyst is not causing any symptoms, it may be left alone. If a pilonidal cyst becomes infected, treatment is needed. The first line of treatment is often draining the cyst. This can help relieve pain from the abscess.

To drain the cyst, your health care provider will numb the area. Then a small incision, or cut, is made into the cyst. The pus and other fluids from the cyst are drained. Any hair follicles may also be removed. After a cyst is drained, dead skin and tissue are removed. This improves the rate of healing. Pilonidal cysts often happen again after treatment. If this is the case, other surgical treatment may be needed. Most cases of pilonidal cysts require surgical treatment.



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There are several types of surgery that treat pilonidal cysts. Some surgeries remove the entire cyst and a small amount of healthy tissue around it. This is called excision surgery. After excision surgery some wounds are closed right away and others are left open to heal. Closed wounds heal quicker than open wounds but have a higher chance of getting infected. If a closed wound gets infected, it may need to be reopened in order to heal.

Wounds that are left open after excision surgery heal from the inside out. This can help reduce the risk of recurring cysts. If the excision surgery wound is left open, it may be cleaned out and packed with gauze at least two times each day. The goal is to keep the wound as clean as possible as it heals. How long an open wound takes to heal depends on how deep the wound is. The average healing time is about 8 weeks. An open wound has a lower rate of infection and re-growth of the cyst than a closed wound.



A procedure called a cleft lift removes the pockets of infection and reshapes the cleft area of the buttocks, making it flatter. This surgery has the benefit of a quick recovery time and closed wound along with a low chance the cyst will reform. Other surgeries may remove more tissue, including skin as well as underlying muscle and fat. Then a flap of tissue is taken from the buttocks to fill the area and make it more shallow and flat. This also reduces the chance of cysts re-forming in the area.

Talk to your health care provider about which treatment option is best for your case. Ask about the risks and possible complications of each type of surgery. After surgery, you may be told to shave around the area so hairs cannot grow into the wound as it heals.



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Summary

A cyst is an abnormal pocket of pus or fluid. A pilonidal cyst forms near the tailbone at the top of the crease of the buttocks. The tailbone is the small bone at the bottom of your backbone, or spine. Sometimes a pilonidal cyst may become infected and can be painful. If the cyst becomes infected, it is called a pilonidal abscess.

It is not known for sure what causes pilonidal cysts. But there are many possible causes, including:

- Loose hairs that penetrate the skin.
- Ruptured hair follicles.
- Trauma to the area around the tailbone.



It is also possible that a person may be born with a pilonidal cyst. A cyst may need to be drained or removed surgically, especially if it is infected. Pilonidal cysts often recur, or re-form. Talk to your health care provider about treatment options and which may be best for your case.

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