



## *Pilonidal Disease*

### **What is a “pilonidal cyst?”**

A “pilonidal cyst” is a lump under the skin, located in the crease between the buttocks. It may cause an infection or “abscess” under the skin, near or above the tailbone, and may cause pain and swelling in the area. Sometimes, like a large pimple, the infection either bursts through the skin by itself, or may need to be lanced or drained to let the infected fluid out. A pilonidal cyst may become infected only once, or may come back in the same place repeatedly.

### **What causes pilonidal cysts?**

Some people are born with a small abnormal area under the skin, which later can develop into a pilonidal cyst. In other cases, the cyst may develop from ingrown hairs between the buttocks. In most people, there is no definite way to tell whether the cyst has been present from birth or has developed from ingrown hairs.

### **What can be done about pilonidal cysts?**

If an “abscess” is present, containing infected material or pus, it is important to release the fluid by making a small opening in the cyst. This is done after first making the area numb using Novocain-type local anesthesia. Once fluid is released, the pain rapidly disappears. Antibiotics are usually unnecessary after the fluid is drained.

In many cases, this small procedure completely alleviates symptoms and the problem does not recur. If the cyst becomes infected repeatedly, and does not go away on its own, surgery may be recommended to remove the cyst itself. Such surgery must be done in an operating room, but can usually be done as “outpatient surgery,” allowing the patient to return home an hour or two after the procedure is completed. There is usually little postoperative pain, and most people can return to work within the next couple of days.

### **What are the results of treatment?**

Most people are free of further problems with pilonidal cysts after these procedures. However, in some cases, the cyst can recur. The reasons for this are not known. It is possible for a new cyst to form from an ingrown hair, or it is possible to have another congenital cyst flare up at a later time. When this happens, surgery can again be done, with the specifications of the procedure being dictated by the nature of the recurrence.