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ANORECTAL ABSCESS & FISTULA – WHAT ARE THEY?

An **abscess** is a collection of pus – rather like a boil. Abscesses which occur around the anal area probably result from infection of a small gland which is one of many which may encircle the lower part of the anal canal. The pus builds up in the tissues around the anal canal and then tends to present as a painful lump around the anal area. If the abscess bursts, then there is likely to be a communication (fistula track) between the lower part of the anal canal and the skin beside the anus, and such an abnormal communication is referred to as a **fistula**.

Management and treatment

Abscesses generally will not be cured by antibiotics and do require drainage (“incising”). Drainage can sometimes take place as an office procedure, but in most instances will require general anaesthesia in an operating room.

An abscess may well recur if the underlying fistula track is not located and laid open. Often this track can be laid open at the time that the abscess is drained, but sometimes infection prevents the surgeon from identifying it.

Under such circumstances when all the infection has settled, it may be appropriate to have a further procedure done at an elective date to identify the fistula track, lay it open and thus prevent further problems.