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### **Surgery for Anal Fistula**

This document will give you information about surgery for an anal fistula. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

#### **What is an anal fistula?**

An anal fistula is an abnormal connection between the lining on the inside of your anal canal (back passage) and the skin near your anus. Most anal fistulas are caused by an abscess (a collection of pus) which has developed in your anal canal. The pus can drain away onto the skin on its own or by an operation. A fistula happens when the track, made by the pus on the way to the surface of the skin, stays open.

#### **What are the benefits of surgery?**

If the operation is successful, you should no longer have any infection or pain.

#### **Are there any alternatives to surgery?**

Most anal fistulas do not heal on their own. Surgery is usually needed to treat the problem.

#### **What does the operation involve?**

Surgery for anal fistula is usually performed under a general anesthetic. To lessen the risk of bowel incontinence (when you pass a motion without wanting to) your treatment may involve several operations over a number of months. The type of surgery you need will depend on where the fistula is (see figure 1).. If the fistula is below the sphincter muscles, your surgeon will try to drain the pus from the fistula. They will then cut it open to the skin and leave the wound open so that it can heal with healthy tissue. If the fistula has branches that pass through the sphincter muscles, your surgeon may place a special stitch (called a seton stitch) in the fistula to allow pus to drain easily. If the fistula reaches above your sphincter muscles, you may need to have a temporary colostomy (bowel opening onto the skin). However, this is not common.