

Anal Fistulae

An anal fistula is a tunnel that forms underneath the skin in the anal region. The fistula connects an infected anal gland to the opening of the anus. It usually occurs when an anal abscess is untreated, and the infection worsens and spreads from the anal gland to the surface of the anus. However, a fistula can also occur due to:

- Rectal cancer
- STI's (sexually transmitted infections)
- Bowel disease
- Anal tuberculosis

This is a serious colorectal condition and requires immediate medical attention. According to the World Health Organization, from 50,000 to 100,000 new cases of anal fistulae are reported each year worldwide. Of these, 30% to 50% of patients start with an anal abscess that worsens into a fistula.

Our board-certified colorectal specialists at Huntington Colorectal Surgeons in Pasadena, California, are highly experienced in treating anal fistulae in patients of all ages. You can trust your colorectal health with us.

Signs & symptoms of anal fistulae

- Distressing pain in the anus, especially during a bowel movement.
- Presence of anal abscess.
- Foul-smelling discharge from the anus.
- Redness and swelling at the anal opening.
- Presence of blood during defecation.
- Fever and fatigue that manifest along with the above symptoms.

If you notice any of the above symptoms, you must visit our Pasadena colorectal surgical hospital. Not treating fistulae at the earliest can result in complications like:

- Fecal incontinence.
- Extremely severe infection.
- Formation of multiple severe fistulae.

At Huntington Colorectal Surgeons, we are one of the first practices in the city to adopt cutting-edge robotic surgery for anal fistulae. Our minimally-invasive procedures will ensure a safe and comfortable surgical experience and facilitate quicker healing.

Contact us to schedule a consultation with Dr. Howard Kaufman, Dr. Gabriel Akopian, or Dr. Julianne Golan.

How we diagnose anal fistulae

Some anal fistulae are very close to the surface of the anal opening and therefore, easy to spot with the naked eye. In most cases, you may require a CT scan or a colonoscopy to diagnose anal fistulae. The colonoscopy is minimally-invasive and is done under sedation, ensuring you are completely pain-free.

Surgical treatments for anal fistulae

Our colorectal specialists will first conduct a comprehensive medical evaluation to identify your unique requirements. Based on your medical history, challenges, and needs, we will schedule a specific surgery to successfully treat fistulae.

The types of surgery we use to treat anal fistulae are:

- **Fistulotomy**

This surgery is ideal for cases where the anal fistula doesn't pass through the anal sphincters. Here, our surgeons will cut completely along the line of the fistula, to open it up and allow it to heal as scar tissue.

- **Seton techniques**

If the fistula passes through the sphincters, the Seton technique is a better option. Medical-grade sutures are loosely stitched onto the fistula to allow them to drain off the pus. These sutures are later tightened to close the fistula.

- **Advancement flap procedure**

Here, the fistulae are resected from the anus and the treatment site is reconstructed using fresh rectal tissue harvested from your rectum. Since this is your tissue, there are fewer chances of tissue rejection post-surgery.

- **LIFT procedure**

This is a very new-age technique that is used when a fistulotomy is deemed too risky for you. Here, the tissue above the fistula is cut, the sphincter muscles are pushed open slightly, and the fistula's ends are sutured shut so that the cut is left open for dressing.

- **Non-surgical procedures:**

- **Fibrin glue**

This technique is used in very minor fistulae. Body-safe fibrin glue is injected into the fistulae to stimulate closure and healing.

- **Bioprosthetic plug**

This is a cone-shaped plug made from animal/human tissue. The plug closes the fistula's internal section, preventing further tears, while the external section is left open to facilitate drainage.

Each of these procedures is performed after administering a local anesthetic. Any infection in the fistulae is cleaned thoroughly and diseased tissue is resected.

After the procedure, we provide a bespoke care plan that you will need to follow for a few weeks to ensure that the fistula heals perfectly. We also recommend the type of diet, exercise, and clothing you'll need to follow up, to facilitate faster healing. Feel free to speak to us for more information.

