Anal Fissures

An anal fissure is a small tear or cut in the skin lining the anus. The anus is a ring-like muscle at the end of the rectum that controls bowel movements. Fissures that are present less than 30 days are called acute fissures. Those that are present for a longer time are called chronic fissures.

Symptoms
The most common symptom of an anal fissure is extreme cutting or tearing pain during a bowel movement. The pain can last for several minutes after a bowel movement. Bright red blood on the outside of your stool and on the toilet paper is also common. Other symptoms are itching, swelling and discharge from your rectum.

Causes
The most common cause is large, hard bowel movements that cause tears in the anal opening. Other causes include severe diarrhea, inflammatory bowel disease and trauma.

Treatment
An acute fissure rarely needs surgery. Treatment may include:

- Hydrocortisone cream - Use around the anal opening to help control the discomfort.
- Nitroglycerin based ointment - Use on the anal opening to increase blood flow to aid healing.
- Stool softener - Use products like Colace to prevent constipation.
- High fiber food in diet - Eat fruits, vegetables and whole grains to add bulk to the stool.
- Water - Drink at least 8 glasses of water each day to soften stool.
- Fiber supplement - Take a product like Metamucil, Citrucel or Konsyl each day to add bulk to your stool.
- Warm tub baths or sitz baths - Do three times each day for 10-20 minutes each time.
- No straining during bowel movements.
- No anal trauma.
A chronic fissure may need more treatment. Treatment may include:

- Referral to a gastroenterologist - Doctor with special training to check for bowel disease that may be causing ongoing constipation or diarrhea.
- Outpatient surgery - Cutting out the old fissure and scar tissue or cutting a muscle of the anal sphincter to reduce spasm and pressure. Most patients who have the surgery have no further problem with fissures.