

# Hidradenitis Suppurativa: Things to Know and What to Expect

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## What is hidradenitis suppurativa?

**Hidradenitis suppurativa** is a condition in which chronic (long term), recurring inflammation (painful swelling and irritation) develops in the skin. This happens most commonly in the underarms and in the groin areas, but it can also occur around the anus and on the buttocks, on the back of the neck or scalp, and under the breasts in women.

There is a wide range of severity. In its earliest form deep skin tissue contains broken cysts (pimple-like bumps) made of skin secretions that have built up, forming small cysts. If the cysts burst into the surrounding tissue, it causes inflammation and tenderness. In more severe forms, long term swelling and irritation develops, leading to scarring and in some cases long term infection and oozing drainage.

- There is no effective medical treatment for the advanced form of the disease that has caused scarring and recurring inflammation/infection. This has to be controlled by surgically removing the inflamed tissue.
- If the disease is not extensive or severe, the operation may be done as an outpatient with follow-up in the clinic in 1-3 days. If the wounds are very large or several areas in the body are treated at one time, you may be admitted to the hospital for wound care for the first few days.

## **What can I expect after surgery?**

Your wounds were partially closed, with the central portions packed open with gauze. You can leave these dressings in place until your return appointment in 2 days, when we will see you in the General Surgery clinic. During surgery all the inflamed or affected skin was removed. The wound is allowed to heal “from the bottom up” with dressing changes.

## **What follow up care will I receive?**

During your return appointment the wound packing is removed and we will teach you how to do dressing changes.

- You will do moist gauze packing and outer dressing changes 3 times a day. Plain tap water works fine for moistening the dressings. Dressing changes are done 3 times a day to keep the wound clean and moist. This speeds the healing and reduces pain.
- The open wounds can be rinsed vigorously in the shower once a day (or more). Sterile technique is not needed.

The first 10 days of dressing changes can be painful, but after about 10 days, the pain subsides dramatically if these instructions are followed. Most people need help from family members to do the dressing changes at least at first, and most family members learn how to do this quite well. Visiting nurses may be able to assist, but they cannot do dressing changes 3 times a day or replace help from family or friends.

It takes anywhere from 4-8 weeks, sometimes longer, for wounds to heal. We will follow you closely in clinic during this time. Smaller wounds heal more quickly than larger ones. They ordinarily heal with very little scarring.

Surgery can control or eliminate active disease, but does not necessarily prevent recurrence (reappearance) in another area. If hidradenitis suppurativa

does reoccur, it is best to surgically remove it as quickly as possible, it is usually much easier than the first operation.

If you have questions or feel you need to be seen again for any reason, you can contact the Surgery Call Center at (734) 936-5738.

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