

Example of GPs script:

Patient contribution

You look in pain.

Oh, dear. Tell me more.

Can I check, is there anything else going on? Was there any other issue you were planning to raise today, or was it just that?

ICE

It might be worst case?

Okay, okay, and you're thinking it's probably a pile, come down, or a fissure or something like that?

Was there anything else that was on your mind, just when you use the words 'worst case', I'm thinking...

Did you see anything?

Okay, and what was going through your mind?

Did google come up with anything else?

Have you spoken to anyone else? I mean, obviously you've done your google search and you've found a few pictures. Have you spoken to anyone else to try and...

And with coming here today, did you have any particular thoughts as to what you were hoping I would do for you?

Okay, that makes sense. So, also take some of that pain away, if we can.

Okay, any theories about where it's come from, or why it's happened to you now?

Do you think it might be age related?

So, you're wondering whether that might have been a trigger for it, okay.

Was there anything else on your mind?

And with coming here today, did you have any particular thoughts as to what you were hoping I would do for you?

PSO

Just remind me what you do?

So, spending a lot of time in the car and travelling around the country a lot, from the sounds of things, and this is stopping you from doing your job, because you can't sit on your backside for any prolonged period of time.

In terms of making that all safe for you, you're still trying to be at work at the moment, You've got no holidays, you've not got any leave time or anything like that?

Domestic arrangements, you like at home with your wife...

How old are your kids now?

You're not a smoker? Not a big drinker?

Do you mind me asking a bit more about that?

Every night?

Okay, I mean, are you aware of the government's current recommendations in terms of alcohol consumption?

Is there any way you could see yourself to having two or three alcohol-free nights a week?

Is that viable?

Alcohol's not had any ill effects to you just yet though?

And you're not aware of it being a particular problem to other people that you know about?

Yeah, two pints every night?

So, we're talking about kind of twenty-eight units a week, aren't we?

It's double the safe limits.

So, activity-wise, you're quite active still? You're able to still put ninety minutes on the clock?

Red flags

Your weight's been steady?

But generally, your health has been good, yeah?

No lumps or bumps anywhere else then?

Focussed history

So, you've previously had an anal fissure, but that was about three years ago.

You've also had a bit of a pile before, that went away completely.

And what you've had for a week, maybe two weeks, is you've had something else new going on back there, but it's all around the backside area?

But it's been agony for a week?

And I can see it's difficult for you to sit down.

Do I need to know anything more about you in terms of the risk of problems with your bowels or any reason why you might be prone to getting piles or fissures or anything like that?

Okay, so he didn't have anything serious going on, but he did have tears in his backside and piles.

And your weight's - clearly, you're of a good body mass index, you don't look as if you're overweight or underweight.

Good, and your blood pressure's all been fine?

Focussed examination

First of all, I'm just going to have a feel of your tummy, so lie on your back, if you're comfortable to do that.

So 93kg is not an unusual weight for you?

If you just loosen your belt, that would be great. Put your head down on the pillow, that's lovely. So, no lumps down below, your testicles are okay; everything's working alright down there?

If we turn you onto your side, so you're facing towards the wall. You're used to this, because we've done it before?

If you could just bring your pants down at the back, that would be great.

Knees up towards your tummy. You've got, not a true pile, but a sentinel pile, and it's exquisitely tender, isn't it?

Okay, that's helpful to know. We'll see what you can tolerate, but it may be that it's a bit too sore to examine you fully at the moment, just because this is fresh. Agony, alright. So, the back of your anal passage there?

I'm not going to manage to put my finger any further up, I don't think we need to.

Identify problem and explain diagnosis

You've got a really fresh anal fissure. A tear, you would say, and then you've got a very tender area, which is your sentinel pile there as well.

It's not a prolapse, no, it's not a prolapse at all.

It's swollen because of the tear.

Usually what happens with these is that you tear (the skin) when you defecate. So, when you're passing a big stool or a hard stool, or if it's coming out too quickly, then it rips the backside, like a paper-cut. Just a tiny little sore that's there, and your anus is going into spasm...

So, there's no rectal prolapse. What a rectal prolapse is a big, beefy red thing that comes down, but this is just on one margin of the anus.

Check understanding

Does that make sense?

Have you got any questions at this point?

Do you want to clarify anything?

Develops management plan / shares management plan

The options that we have to help you with this - often times when it's so painful and it's so difficult to get you pass stool at the moment, it's important that we soften your poo.

So, I would suggest that we give you something that's going to be effective in terms of making your poo soft.

Options you've got are laxido, which works quite well and is a bit more reliable, or if it was just something really mild you wanted, and you just wanted to go for something like Bisacodyl, that would be reasonable as well.

So maybe laxido?

So, it's a sachet that you take once or twice a day just to make sure that your stool is coming and that it's not hard when you go.

These can take a while to fully heal.

But we usually would get the worst of that pain under control quite quickly, with the options that we're going to suggest, but because it's so sore at the moment, I'm going to suggest a couple of things for you. With so much spasm, it's often worthwhile using a local ointment.

And one of the ointments that is as good as anything and less likely to cause any side effects is an ointment called diltiazem.

So, it's a treatment that you just put on the outside of your anus.

Okay, and you put that on as often as you need. We usually recommend three times a day; but whenever the spasm is there...

And you almost certainly won't have any side effects, and hopefully that will relieve that spasm quite well.

It's also probably worthwhile giving you something else inside your anus. Now, I quite often, if the pain's not quite so bad I would recommend that we use something like clotrimazole, because it's anti-bacterial and anti-yeast and it encourages the healing process. But because you've got so much inflammation and soreness there, it might be worthwhile temporarily giving you something that's got a steroid in it.

But it's not easy for you to get ointment up there, so maybe if we give you a small suppository to put up your backside, and you can do that every time you defecate, you put another one up there for the next few days until we've got on top of things.

So, if it's taking as long as that, and not healing and not going in the right direction, then what we do is we tend to ask a surgeon to treat you with botox. And that lasts for several months, but there is a small danger with doing that, that we're going to make you leak. But, that would be a temporary problem, because the botox paralyses the muscle around your backside, but only very temporarily.

So, that's another option, if it's not healing. Okay. It might be helpful for you to read up a bit more a bit more about the nature of an anal fissure.

So, patient.info is a reasonably good source of information about that sort of thing.

Well, I think it's a good idea for you to be having soluble fibre in your diet, it's worthwhile exploring what those - what is meant by soluble fibre in your diet. Is your diet an issue?

This is an instance where eating five pieces of fruit and veg a day is worthwhile.

There's also good evidence that eating cereals is good for your health as well. Porridge is a good, healthy meal, as well, for your breakfast. Okay, if your blood pressure was an issue then we tend to recommend flaxseed or linseed - those are good evidence-based treatments to protect your bowel, as well as to protect your blood pressure, as well.

Safety net and follow up

...but if you're not happy with the options that we've discussed already and we're not hitting the mark in terms of relieving the pain, then get back to me straight away and we'll go through something else that might be helpful for you.

And, if you then think, 'oh, I wonder if that could be a prolapse', then we'll see you urgently.

So, if we speak on the phone again in a week's time just to make sure that you're happy that we're going in the right direction, or if you're not getting any relief from the pain, then you give me a telephone call.

So, if it's taking as long as that (2-3 months), and not healing and not going in the right direction, then what we do is we tend to ask a surgeon to treat you with botox.