

Audio guide 3 How to Describe Your Symptoms to Your Doctor

Corey Greenblatt 00:03

Welcome to audio guide three, A Patient's Guide to Understanding Complex Perianal Fistula. This guide is produced by the Global Healthy Living Foundation and made possible with support from Takeda. I'm Corey Greenblatt, Associate Director of Policy and Advocacy for the Global Healthy Living Foundation.

Corey Greenblatt 00:21

And today we'll learn more about the symptoms of fistula and how to talk to your doctor about them. Whether you or someone you know has a fistula, or even if you think you might, these audio guides are designed to help make sense of the symptoms and get you the care you need. Accurate information will help you work with your health care team to hopefully have fewer and less severe symptoms. Please remember that fistula is a medical issue and always talk to your healthcare team if you have symptoms that bother or worry you.

Corey Greenblatt 00:54

A fistula is one of the major intestinal complications of Crohn's disease affecting roughly 35 to 53 percent of people with Crohn's. In general, a fistula is an abnormal tunnel between two areas of the body. A fistula diagnosis can initially feel overwhelming. You might experience symptoms that seem embarrassing or uncomfortable, such as stool or gas leakage, which can impact your body image and self esteem. It's understandable if you're hesitant to discuss these symptoms with others. However, it's important to remember that reaching out to your health care provider and sharing what's going on is a crucial step. It's your healthcare providers job to listen, no matter how uncomfortable it feels to talk about your symptoms. By openly discussing your symptoms with your healthcare professional, you can begin a treatment plan right away. Left untreated, the condition can get much worse.

Corey Greenblatt 01:48

The two main symptoms of perianal fistula are pain and drainage. The location and severity of the fistula will determine your symptoms. Fistulas can initially cause a lump or swelling around the anus that can be very painful. You may feel pain or irritation when sitting, moving, coughing, or having a bowel movement and growth of perianal fistula can also cause the drainage of pus, blood, stool, or mucus. Additionally, you can experience symptoms such as fever, chills, redness, bleeding, constipation, uncontrolled bowels.

Corey Greenblatt 02:25

Talking to your doctor about the unpleasant symptoms of perianal fistula can be very hard, it can feel awkward or embarrassing, but know that fistula is not your fault, and your doctor is there to help and see what they can do to minimize the impact on your quality of life. If you think you're having fistula symptoms, you should see a gastroenterologist or colorectal surgeon. Going to a center that specifically

works with patients with inflammatory bowel disease or IBD can make the conversation easier since the health care professionals are practiced in talking about IBD and the complications such as fistulas.

Corey Greenblatt 03:03

Once you have an appointment, here are a few ways you can participate in the conversation. Number one, bring your medical history of Crohn's disease or other inflammatory bowel diseases if you have one. Number two, note the location and severity of your pain. Is there pain or tenderness around the rectum? Do you feel a tender lump. Number three, report any fluid drainage issues and describe whether it is pus, fecal matter, or blood. Number four, describe any additional symptoms such as fever or chills. Number five, be persistent in being seen right away, especially if there is a possibility of infection to avoid sepsis.

Corey Greenblatt 03:43

While there are no quick fixes when it comes to inflammatory bowel disease or fistula we hope this audio guide helps you feel more comfortable with sharing your symptoms with your health care provider. Thank you for listening today to our audio guide on fistulas in Crohn's disease, I'm Corey Greenblatt, Associate Director of Policy and Advocacy for the Global Healthy Living Foundation. For more information about managing Crohn's disease and fistula please visit ghlf.org/fistula-support.

Narrator 04:16

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