



INSIDE THE ANUS

Learning Voluntary Muscle Control

AS YOU HAVE SEEN, awareness of what you're *actually* experiencing—not an idealized notion of perfection—is the essence of all bodily enjoyment. If you remain attuned to yourself, you can begin to develop voluntary control over your anal muscles. This is not an authoritarian “Do what I tell you!” type of control, but rather a natural and easy flow between what you intend and how your anus responds. In order to acquire this control, you first need information about how your anal muscles work.

ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY OF THE ANAL CANAL

THE ANAL CANAL is a tube-shaped entryway, less than an inch long, which leads into your rectum. The outer two-thirds of the anal canal is made of the

same soft, sensitive tissue that is visible around the opening. The inner third of the anal canal is lined with mucous membrane. This part of the canal is less sensitive to touch than the outer two-thirds, but is very sensitive to pressure. Depending on whether it is wanted, pressure can produce either relaxation or tightening of the surrounding muscles.

The folds of anal tissue give the anal canal a striking capacity for expansion, which varies tremendously according to personal preference, degree of relaxation, amount of practice, and other circumstances. For example, during rectal surgery, under anesthesia, a person's anal muscles can easily be dilated so that the surgeon's entire hand can pass through the anal canal.

In the erotic realm a similar expansiveness is called upon in the activity known as "fisting" or "handballing," which involves inserting several fingers or an entire hand into the anus and rectum. Although hardly a mainstream form of sex play, anal fisting is more popular than most people realize (more on fisting in Chapter 9). These extremes of anal expansion are not experienced by most people, but they do illustrate that anal tissue can easily and safely accommodate a finger, object, or penis.

Below the surface of the anal mucosa, veins and arteries pass blood through cavernous (filled with spaces) columns of tissue called *anal cushions*. There are three of these cushions running the short length of the anal canal. The cushions are anchored by connective tissue and muscle fibers to the internal sphincter muscle. Within the anal cushions, blood passes from arteries to veins without any capillaries (the tiniest of blood vessels that usually connect arteries and veins). As a result, blood flows with extreme ease through the anal cushions.

During a healthy bowel movement, or during the insertion of something into the anal canal, the anal sphincters relax, allowing some blood to leave the cushions. However, if the sphincters are not relaxed, the anal cushions remain congested with blood. This is what happens when a person strains to force a bowel movement or uses force to insert something into the anal canal. The result is an uncomfortable stinging sensation or other pain. If such straining or forcing happens on a regular basis, a variety of medical problems such as hemorrhoids (protrusions from the anal cushions) or fissures (tears or cracks in the anal lining) can result. To prevent or eliminate this discomfort and the possibility of damage, it's necessary to understand how the two anal sphincter muscles work.

The anal canal maintains its tubular shape because of two ring-like sphincter muscles (see Figure 3). The sphincters are very close together, overlapping somewhat, and are quite capable of functioning independently, which they often do. The *external sphincter* is closest to the anal opening and is controlled by the

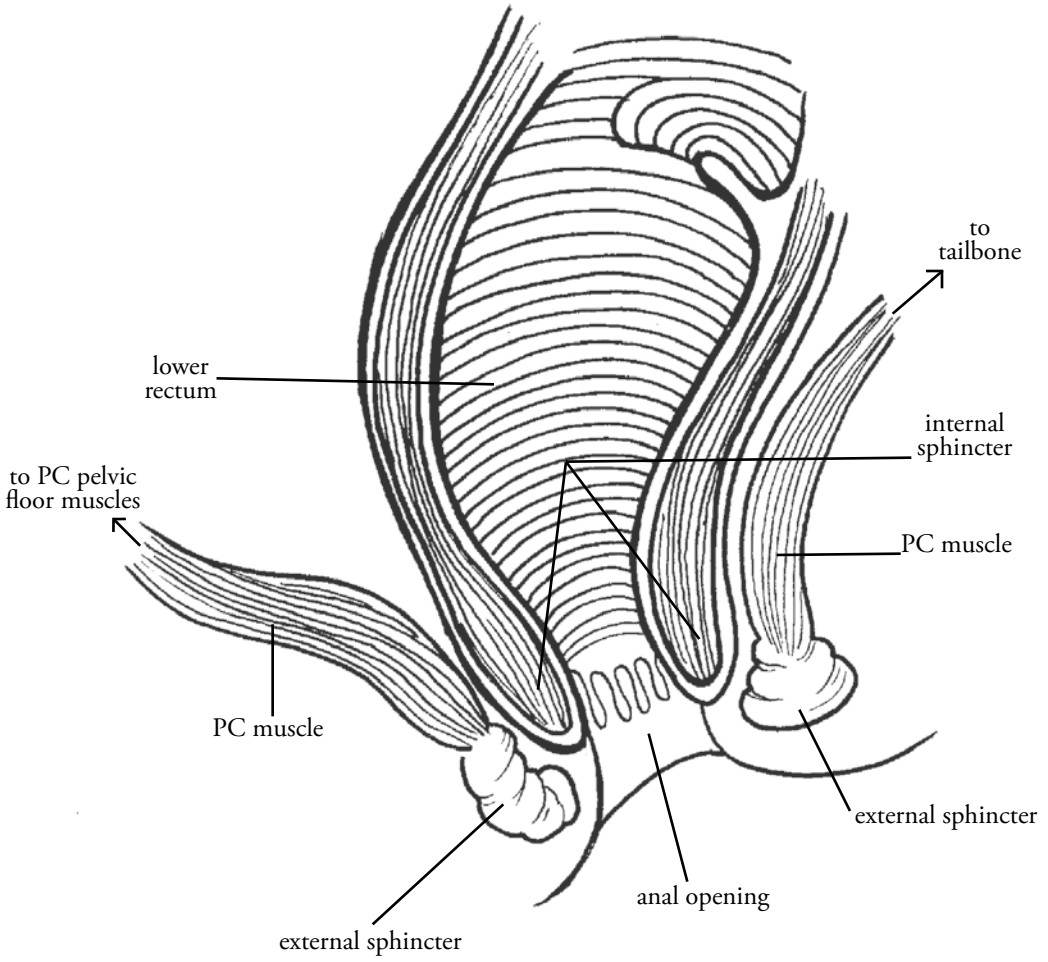


Figure 3. Internal and External Anal Sphincter Muscles

central nervous system, the same system that activates muscles in the hands, arms, or legs. With a little concentration, we can make the external sphincter tense or relax at will—just as we move our fingers whenever we want.

The *internal sphincter* is quite different. It is neurologically controlled by the autonomic nervous system, the same system that makes adjustments in blood pressure, respiration rate and other “involuntary” body functions. Because the internal sphincter normally functions reflexively, most people can’t tense or relax it at will.

When feces pass from the colon into the rectum, the pressure of fullness triggers the *rectal reflex*. This involves the automatic relaxation of the internal sphincter and a partial draining of blood from the anal cushions. Then the voluntary relaxation of the external sphincter allows for a quick and easy bowel movement.

Three factors can and often do disrupt this course of events. First, many people have been taught to ignore the urge for defecation caused by the rectal reflex. Instead they hold back, not wanting to be bothered going to the toilet. Perhaps they believe that bowel movements ought to occur only at certain predetermined times—a notion fostered by over-strict toilet training practices. When it’s consistently ignored or overridden, the rectal reflex fades and the internal sphincter stops relaxing. Once this has occurred, almost every bowel movement requires pushing and straining. Any person who wants a healthy and relaxed anus must learn to pay attention to the rectal reflex. Gradually, the natural urges it produces will again become obvious.

Another factor that can inhibit the rectal reflex is the common habit of resisting the passage of intestinal gases (flatus) through the anal opening. Gases are naturally formed during food digestion, and obsessive attempts to avoid farting inevitably result in unnecessary and potentially destructive muscle tension. Certainly most of us prefer to exercise some control over the timing of our farts. However, it is a mistake to adopt an always-hold-it policy.

The third, and perhaps most important, factor that disrupts relaxation of the internal sphincter during bowel movements is the absence of adequate fiber in our diet, and thus in our stools. Feces should be soft yet well-formed and bulky. Small, hard feces don’t provide the fullness necessary to trigger the rectal reflex. Once again, the person must resort to straining whenever bowel movements are attempted.

If your stools are not large, well-formed and slightly moist, your goal of anal awareness, pleasure and health will be very difficult to reach unless you add significant quantities of fiber to your diet every day. With adequate fiber,

your rectal reflex can be triggered more easily. This will help you immensely in learning how to relax your internal sphincter muscle. The best sources of fiber are whole grains, legumes (beans and peas), nuts, some fresh fruits, and vegetables.

Fiber preparations such as psyllium (Metamucil® or cheaper generics) can also be taken as a supplement. Psyllium is made from the husks of seeds and is, therefore, all natural. Avoid the type that includes a chemical laxative; these should be used sparingly, if at all. In the past, psyllium fiber had to be mixed with liquid to form a rather unappealing drink. Now you can buy it in capsules, which are much easier to take, unless you have a swallowing problem. Always take these capsules with a full glass of water.

The ease with which you have bowel movements and the pleasure you receive from anal stimuli will be greatly enhanced if you learn how to voluntarily relax the internal sphincter. How can a person learn voluntary control over an “involuntary” body process? That such control is possible at all still isn’t widely recognized in the West. In the East, practitioners of healing methods such as yoga and acupuncture have focused on this possibility for centuries. In the West, the turning point was the development of biofeedback, which involves the use of mechanical or electronic devices to provide a person with visual or auditory information about what the body is doing. Put simply, it has been found that if a person can get clear, immediate feedback (such as a changing tone or flashing light) about some “involuntary” body function (such as blood pressure, brain waves, or skin temperature), before long he or she will be able noticeably to influence that function just by paying attention to it.

The key to voluntary control of the sphincter muscles, particularly the internal one, is a steady, accurate stream of information about what the muscle is doing. Happily, no electronic instruments are needed to provide this information. Your body is already equipped with a supersensitive biofeedback device that you can use at any moment—your finger. By inserting a finger into your anal canal, locating the two sphincters, and paying attention to the information your finger provides, you can learn to relax the muscles at will.

Before you begin to explore inside your anus, you should know that your anal canal and rectum normally contain little if any feces. Your rectum and anal canal are merely passageways for feces which, during a bowel movement, are moved by muscular waves called *peristalsis* out of the colon and into the rectum and out through the anal canal. Feces are not normally stored in the rectum for long periods of time. However, those who have learned to ignore

the rectal reflex or whose feces are not well-formed are much more likely to encounter feces in the lower rectum, a situation that can be remedied by changes in diet and toilet habits.

Bathing is usually adequate for cleaning this area, especially when you learn to feel comfortable putting your finger in your anus as part of bathing or showering. If, however, you are concerned about cleanliness, you might want to give yourself an anal douche.

ANAL DOUCHING (ENEMAS)

ANAL DOUCHING is the process of introducing warm water into the anal canal and lower rectum, holding that liquid inside for a couple of minutes, and then releasing it. An enema involves a similar process, with two big differences. First, the goal is having a bowel movement rather than cleanliness. And second, enemas typically include various stimulating (and irritating) chemicals. There was a time when some children were forced to submit to regular enemas as “treatment”—more like punishment—for constipation or for general health. That practice has mostly stopped, but way too many people still rely on chemical enemas for their bowel movements. Not only can this be habit-forming, but using them too often can ruin a person’s ability to have bowel movements naturally.

While it’s smart to stay away from chemical enemas, plain water douching solely for the purpose of cleaning the anus and lower rectum is harmless, with no negative side-effects if done sensibly. Many people report that the feeling of cleanliness that results helps them relax because they’re no longer concerned about encountering feces during anal play.

There are four basic means of anal douching. First, you can buy a disposable Fleet® enema at the drugstore. It comes in a plastic bottle with a flexible, lubricated tip for insertion into the anus. Just empty out the unnecessary chemical solution and fill the container with warm water. It can be used over and over again as long as the tip is thoroughly washed after each use. Second, you can get a rubber bulb-shaped “ear syringe” sold in drugstores for gently cleaning the inner ear, and use it the same way. Both of these methods will introduce a relatively small amount of water into the lower rectum. For many people, though, it’s just the right amount. Some people use a plastic turkey baster with a rubber bulb, but these are made of hard plastic, often with rough edges and seams, so I don’t recommend them.

For those who wish to introduce water farther into the rectum, a third alternative is a rubber bag with a hose, a clip to regulate water flow, and a rounded tip designed for vaginal douching. The bag is suspended above the user so that the water flows easily via gravity. Finally, several products specifically designed for anal douching can be permanently installed between the water supply and the shower head. These can be quite convenient for regular users, but they must be used with very low water pressure. Water temperature must also be carefully monitored—not too hot!*

Some people enjoy the process of anal douching, whereas others merely tolerate it as a practical means to an end. Still others have a visceral negative reaction to douching. In some instances, the douche is a reminder of invasive and traumatic childhood enemas. Sometimes the sensations simply aren't pleasant, no matter what the reason. The bottom line: If anal douching makes you uncomfortable, don't do it. Sometimes, however, taking it slow and easy as you get used to the new sensations works wonders. Simply inserting your finger in your anus while showering can provide perfectly adequate cleanliness, especially when preparing for finger stimulation.

LUBRICATION

THE INNER PORTION of the anal canal produces mucus to keep the tissues moist and protected, but anal mucus is not the same as the plentiful lubrication secreted by the vagina. For this reason, extra lubrication should always be applied when you insert your finger or anything else into the anus.

Talking to anal enthusiasts about lubricants is like talking to wine connoisseurs about wine—everybody has a different opinion about which is best. You have to decide this for yourself. A few guiding principles, however, are helpful. First, use a lubricant with as few chemical additives as possible. Your anus and rectum are not as accustomed to a steady assault of harsh chemicals as the rest of your body. Scents, colors and emollients are all chemicals that can irritate anal tissues. Second, lotions and creams don't lubricate well because they're quickly absorbed. Water-soluble lubricants are good because they clean up easily. For this reason, they are the most convenient for anal exploring with your finger. And they're essential if you'll be using a latex condom, because oils or oil-based lubes destroy latex.

* You can survey and purchase a variety of douching devices online. See “Sex Toys and Supplies” in the websites section of “References & Resources.”

If you decide to try more prolonged anal stimulation, then greasy or oily lubricants have an advantage because they last longer. Vegetable shortening, safflower or peanut oil, petroleum jelly, or virtually any of the newer commercial erotic lubricants are all fine. It's a matter of personal preference. Water-soluble lubricants should probably be the only ones used in the vagina (if extra lubrication is desired or needed), because the vagina is a cul-de-sac from which heavy lubricants like petroleum jelly are difficult to wash out.

EXPERIENCE

BEGIN WITH bathing and anal looking and touching, which I hope you have tried many times by now. In preparation, make sure your fingernails are trimmed and filed smooth. Apply a small amount of lubricant to your anal opening and to whichever finger seems most comfortable.

Inhale deeply, contract your anal muscles, and gently press your finger against your anus. As you exhale, let your anal muscles relax until your finger slides easily into your anal canal. Use no more than a gentle pressure. Go in only as far as feels completely comfortable—a quarter of an inch at first is fine. If you feel discomfort or pain, it means that you are pushing too hard and should back off on the pressure.

When your finger is as far into your anus as it will comfortably go, stop there and let your anal muscles get used to the presence of your finger. Your anus will relax even more as it discovers this is not an invasion, but a friendly expedition. Be sure to keep breathing deeply and slowly. Feel the relaxation, but don't push your finger in any further. Stay at this comfort point for as long as you want and then slide your finger out slowly and sensuously.

Each time you repeat this exercise you'll discover that your finger comfortably goes in a little farther. At each step, spend a few minutes moving your finger at a leisurely pace in a circular motion. Stop *before* you feel uncomfortable or bored.

Experiment with moving your finger in and out, back and forth, and around in a circle. Try using your fingertip to gently press at different points around your anal canal. This helps to stretch your anal muscles a bit, just as you might stretch other muscles throughout your body. Never push beyond your personal comfort zone. Do only what your anus will accept without protest. If you realize you've gone too far or too fast, back off a little. But don't

pull out completely—and definitely avoid a rapid pull-out. Jerky movements tend to make your anus more tense.

When you can move your finger around freely, slowly pull it out so that only the tip is inside your anal canal (about one half to three quarters of an inch). Gently press against the walls of the anal canal. You'll be able to distinguish your external and internal sphincter muscles as two separate rings with a small space between them (less than a quarter of an inch). The external one will probably feel more relaxed than the internal one. Notice how you can tense and relax the external sphincter at will, while the internal one seems to have a mind of its own.

Also notice that the internal sphincter frequently changes spontaneously, tensing up a little and then relaxing a little. The most beneficial thing you can do is simply pay attention to your observations, though a simple process known as *mindfulness*. Here's how it works: When your sphincter muscles relaxes a little, say or think to yourself, "relax, relax" or "I'm letting go." When they starts to tense up again, say, "tense, tense" or "I'm tensing up." You're just noticing and describing for yourself what's happening, without trying to control it at all. Gradually—there's no hurry—you'll find that saying or thinking "relax" or "letting go" actually affects your sphincters. But if they don't respond to your relaxed thoughts and tense up anyway, don't fight it; just repeat, "getting tense." You are building a vital link between your thoughts and intentions and your anal and pelvic muscles (remember, they're interconnected). The stronger this linkage becomes, the greater will be your capacity to release when you want to.

Another aspect of mindfulness that makes a huge difference is to not judge yourself or comment negatively on your observations. This attitude of acceptance is all-encompassing. So if the truth is that you're feeling frustrated or discouraged—or anything else—notice that, too, without judgment. The foundation of mindfulness is curious, non-judgmental interest. So if you notice an unexpected feeling or thought coming up, you might think, "Now that's interesting; I wonder what it means?" Always return to your "home base," with your breathing and an easy awareness of your body.*

As a sense of influence over your anal muscles increases, you'll quite easily be able to insert two fingers at a time, or even three if you'd like. The key is to continue using the same unhurried, pressure-free approach. If you happen to

* Cultivating mindfulness can help a lot in your anal explorations, but it's an equally useful approach to virtually any other life concern or challenge, including anxiety and depression. For an in-depth understanding of this remarkable tool for growth, read Jon Kabat-Zinn's *Full Catastrophe Living*.

push beyond your comfort zone, your anus will let you know with an obvious contraction. Gently back off or let go a little. No judgments.

Spend a few minutes as regularly as possible doing this simple exercise. Why not make it a part of daily bathing or showering routine? This way you're more likely to do it. In addition, developing and maintaining the habit of exploring your anus for a few moments each day will help promote a lifetime of anal wellness.

For a more dramatic effect, especially if you're discovering that your anal/pelvic muscles is one of your tension zones, spend extra time exploring your anus in the shower, but don't stop there. Develop the routine of "checking in" with your anus many times throughout the day. Stop what you're doing and tune into whatever sensations you notice in your anus. Take a few deep breaths, clench your anal/pelvic muscles, and then release them on the exhale. It takes disciplined intention to make this happen consistently. But the growing sense of openness and vitality in your pelvis may astound you.

Try a variation of this method the next you feel the urge for a bowel movement. Remember, if you have learned to ignore these natural urges, your first challenge is to detect the signals that your body is ready to defecate. As soon as you feel the urge, go to the bathroom. Once on the toilet, breathe deeply and picture your anal muscles letting go. Allow the muscles of your colon and rectum to expel the feces reflexively and effortlessly—no straining whatsoever. If nothing happens, don't push. Simply leave the bathroom and return again when your body signals its readiness.

RESPONSE

EXPLORING INSIDE your anus can be a turning point in your desire for anal enjoyment and well-being. But keep in mind that if your anus has been abused in the past, whether through painful sexual experiences or straining during bowel movements, it may take your anus a while to trust the presence of your finger. Patience invites release, whereas forcing generates tension.

Once inside your anal canal, even a little, you'll probably encounter new sensations. Some will be pleasurable, while others may feel rather strange. When you experience a new sensation, you may automatically assume that it's uncomfortable and want to quit. This, of course, is exactly what to do if you really do feel discomfort. But take a moment to ask yourself, "Is this new sensation actually uncomfortable, or just *different*?" If it's merely unfamiliar, but not especially uncomfortable, then you can

leave your finger inside for a while as you relax and familiarize yourself with the new feeling.

Exploring your anal canal sometimes triggers memories and pent-up emotions. Of course, you may also recall positive moments of anal pleasure, such as a particularly relieving bowel movement or memorable experiences of touch. But if you've had negative anal experiences in the past—anal medical problems, pelvic pain, or unwanted anal intercourse, for example—then leisurely finger insertions may remind you of what you'd probably rather forget. Ultimately you'll do yourself an important service by paying close attention to any and all feelings or memories, whether positive or negative. An open examination of your personal truth can, as they say, make you free. It helps if you write your responses in your journal after each session, or at least sit back quietly and think about them.

Also pay attention to any signs of resistance, such as forgetting to do the exercises, rarely finding the time, or doing something else when you had intended to touch your anus. There are always legitimate and understandable fears behind strong avoidance, fears which need to be brought to light and honored.

Beth made this important discovery:

I've been having a heck of a time getting anywhere near my anus until the other day when I was just sitting there and it struck me like an 'aha' kind of thing. I suddenly realized I feel *exactly* the same way about my anus that I used to feel about my vagina during my period, like I have a disgusting and shameful wound, or that it's sick or diseased, or God knows what; it's certainly not rational. It's just not right to put my finger into an open wound—way too yucky. I guess all these years I've been waiting for my anus to heal or something. After I thought about this connection for a while, I actually tried my finger and it went in pretty easily. I can't say I'm exactly thrilled about it but—this is embarrassing—I was relieved to find no blood.

Pete's recollection was quite different:

I've always hated fingers in my ass. Every time a guy has tried to put his finger anywhere near there I've braced myself to get fucked any minute. My asshole reacts the same way to my own finger. It's like I'm getting ready to be raped. I now can see I've been more or less raped several times but I just silently went along with it. No wonder my ass is so clenched; it's an angry fist. And, you know, I don't blame it one bit.

As you saw in the last chapter, your anus has a memory, in the sense that it expresses your personal history. However, most people find that the anus does not hold a grudge. Instead, it will respond to a new situation if you patiently and compassionately give it a chance. Once your anal muscles start to respond to your own caring touch, progress is usually rapid. You can then begin to “train” your internal sphincter, not with intimidation, but with understanding. Under coercion of any kind, your anus will automatically assume its instinctive protective posture.

Learning a more natural approach to bowel movements can also increase your capacity for anal pleasure and dramatically reduce the negative effects of chronic straining. To the extent that you usually push your way through a bowel movement, undoing this habit will require special attention. A well-functioning rectal reflex, a diet rich in fiber, and reduced sphincter tension should result in bowel movements being completed within a few minutes. The need for a lot more time strongly suggests that your natural responses are still inhibited.

Modifying the ways in which you have bowel movements can be more complex than you might expect. For instance, rigid toilet training can be a source of great embarrassment, fear and anger. This is especially true when parents believe that anal muscular control can only be fostered by threats of ridicule and coercion. Actually, there’s no reason why anal control shouldn’t occur as automatically as walking and talking. Depending on your experiences as a child, you may find that the reduction of anal over-control, and a return to a more natural elimination pattern, brings with it a rush of unexpected feelings. Many people find themselves spontaneously crying when they first experience the cleansing release of an unforced bowel movement. There’s often anger too: “Goddamn her,” said Meg, referring to her mother. “It’s so easy! Why did she have to make it such a humiliating ordeal?”

It’s not unusual to remember distant parental warnings or instances of “accidents” if anal control was not strictly maintained. If this is true for you, it may take a while to relinquish completely the conviction that chronic anal tension is the price that one must pay for controlling feces. It may require repeated reminding that excess tension serves no useful purpose at all. The innate tone of healthy muscles is all that is needed for effortless anal control.

Although it often sounds silly to people at first, almost all my clients report that a quiet sense of natural pleasure accompanies relaxed bowel movements—those in which the body’s finely-tuned system of elimination

is allowed to function properly. This discovery, of course, is not silly at all. Similar pleasure experiences usually accompany the optimal functioning of any body system. Put simply, bodily health is intrinsically pleasurable, and an overall good feeling lingers.

