



Inspire People. Empower Solutions. End Fistula.

www.fightfistula.org

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Frequently Asked Questions about *Obstetric Fistula* and *One By One*

What is obstetric fistula?

Obstetric fistula is a childbirth injury that is caused by prolonged obstructed labor, a situation that occurs when a baby is not able to pass through the birth canal, and the mom does not have access to emergency obstetric care. Obstructed labor can go on for many days with devastating results. Without a cesarean section, the baby almost always dies (in about 90% of cases), and the mother often dies. If a woman survives, she will likely be left with a fistula - a hole that develops due to damaged tissue between the vagina and the bladder and/or rectum as a result of unrelenting pressure from the baby's head. The consequences of this injury are life shattering. Girls and women who develop a fistula experience chronic incontinence – uncontrollable leaking of urine and sometimes feces – leading to rejection by their families, deep social isolation within their communities, and a lifetime of unimaginable despair.

How common is fistula?

Fistula was once common throughout the world, but was virtually eliminated in North America and Europe over 100 years ago due to advances in obstetric care. Fistula continues to affect huge numbers of girls and women with little access to medical care in developing countries. While data on the prevalence of fistula are very limited, it is estimated that at least 2 million girls and women are living with fistula, and there are at least 50,000 – 100,000 new cases each year.

Can fistula be treated?

Yes, fistula is treatable. Surgery to repair the injury is successful in about 90% of uncomplicated cases. Women typically stay in the hospital for two weeks post-surgery in order to ensure a good medical outcome. Counseling and support during this time are also critical in order to facilitate social reintegration when a woman returns home. The average cost of fistula treatment – including surgery, post-operative care and rehabilitation support – is \$420.

Efforts to treat women with fistula face considerable challenges, however. Many women living with this condition do not understand what it is and what has caused it, and they are often unaware that treatment is available. Moreover, most women cannot afford the cost of transportation to a treatment facility let alone the cost of treatment itself. Outreach and education to raise awareness and understanding is vital, as is ensuring the availability of free services for women who cannot pay.

Fistula treatment transforms lives. It restores a woman's dignity, and allows her to reintegrate into her community (sometimes after many years) and resume a full and productive life.

Can fistula be prevented?

Yes, almost all cases of fistula can be prevented. The complication of obstructed labor cannot be prevented (although risk of obstructed labor can be reduced if childbearing is postponed until an age when the pelvis is fully developed). But “prolonged” obstructed labor (the cause of fistula) **can** be prevented. At a minimum, prevention requires that women have access to basic and emergency obstetric care, including a skilled attendant during delivery and affordable transportation to a facility capable of performing a cesarean section if needed. At a broader level, addressing social issues that contribute to the problem of fistula, such as early pregnancy, can also play an important role in prevention efforts.

Fistula prevention is inextricably linked to improving maternal health care in general. The resources needed to prevent obstetric fistula are the same as those that will prevent maternal death and other tragic outcomes.

As important as treatment is, prevention is the key to ending fistula.

What is One By One?

One By One is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping eradicate fistula worldwide. We work to raise awareness and educate individuals and communities about the problem of obstetric fistula; we generate funds through donations from individuals, corporate sponsorships and grants; and we partner with agencies and organizations in developing countries to support both treatment and prevention efforts.

What countries does One By One work in?

We are currently working in Tanzania, Ethiopia and Niger.

How does One By One spend the money that it raises?

One By One is committed to supporting both treatment and prevention efforts, as both are essential to achieving the long-term goal of putting an end to this horrific condition.

We provide funding to fistula treatment facilities to support increased capacity to perform fistula repair, and we contribute to their ability to offer treatment free of charge. We partner with other organizations that work on outreach and education to improve understanding of this condition within communities, and increase awareness of the availability of treatment services and how to access them.

On the prevention side, we are supporting the development, implementation and evaluation of comprehensive approaches to preventing tragic outcomes of pregnancy. The resources required for safe childbirth are clear and well-known; the challenge is to ensure that these essential resources are in place, coordinated and accessible. One By One is currently supporting two pilot prevention programs that are showing very positive early results, and will serve as important models for efforts in other communities going forward.

One By One also funds research to study innovative prevention tools. A study currently underway is evaluating whether small pelvic size, as measured by ultrasound, is predictive of fistula development. A positive study outcome would suggest that a portable, hand-held ultrasound device could be a tremendously valuable screening tool for identifying women who are at high risk of having obstructed labor, allowing for timely education regarding the critical importance of having a birth plan that includes access to emergency care.

How much money does One By One spend on administrative costs?

One By One spends over 80% of its budget on direct programming.

