

Important Facts About Managing Anal Irritation - Pruritis Ani

Introduction

The medical term for anal irritation is “pruritis ani”, which literally means “itchy anus”. It is a very common condition, which most people experience at some stage in their lives. There are many causes, but treatment is usually aimed at simply relieving the symptoms of itching and irritation around the anus.

What causes Pruritis Ani?

Some patients have recognisable conditions in the anal area which cause irritation. These include skin tags, piles or haemorrhoids, rectal prolapse, fistula-in-ano and fissure-in-ano. All of these can be treated. There are a number of skin conditions which can also cause pruritis ani. These include psoriasis, eczema and infectious with ringworm, threadworm and fungi. Patients with diabetes can also suffer and you will be checked for this routinely. **Most** patients with pruritis ani do not have any of the above conditions and their symptoms are caused either by excessive moisture in the anal area, or by a minor leakage of bowel motion which is very irritant to the delicate skin around the anus. In these cases it is equivalent to “nappy rash” seen in small babies.

What is the treatment for Pruritis Ani?

Your doctor will examine the area thoroughly to exclude any of the treatable conditions listed above. If no obvious cause is found you must be warned that pruritis ani can be difficult to treat and may take many months of gentle care to improve things. The symptoms also often go through good and bad spells. Adherence to the following advice often leads to significant improvements at bad times.

Anal Hygiene

- This is particularly important. Ideally the area should be carefully washed and gently dried at least once a day **and** after every bowel motion.
- Avoid using hard toilet paper to wipe after moving your bowels. A bidet is the best way to clean yourself gently, but a shower head while sitting on the side of the bath is just as good, if less convenient. If this is not possible try using damp cotton wool or “baby wipes” rather than ordinary toilet paper. If you are away from home take a small plastic bottle of water with you to wash with after a bowel action. Whichever technique you use, the aim is to remove **all** residual bowel motion from the crevices in the skin around the anus, without any harsh rubbing of the skin.

- Do not use soap as it can sting, especially if highly perfumed, or containing antiseptic.
- Do not add anything in the bath water. Avoid all antiseptic, bath salts, bath oil and bubble bath. When in the bath wash with water on the hand rather than using a sponge or flannel, which can cause scratching.
- If any leakage continues after cleaning insert a ball of cotton wool at the entrance to the anus. It will be held in position by the buttocks and absorb any liquid leakage before it can damage the skin.
- If you cannot control leakage a barrier cream will help protect the skin. Good ones are “**Metanium**” or “**Vasogen**” and are available from chemists.
- However much you may wish to, try not to scratch the area. If it really is unbearable and you have to do something, gently pinch the skin with your fingers outside your clothes. If you find you are scratching at night while asleep, get some cotton gloves from the chemist.

Diet

- Try to establish a regular bowel habit. This will make the practicalities of hygiene detailed above easier to achieve.
- A diet high in fibre can make it more difficult to control minor leakage. Although fibre often helps achieve a regular bowel habit, it may help to avoid excessive fruit, vegetable and bran thus making a firmer stool.
- Avoid highly seasoned or spicy food.
- Tea and coffee can make the irritation worse.

Clothing

Try not to wear clothes which allow air to circulate to the skin around the anus and which do not cause unnecessary sweating in the area.

- Avoid all manmade fabrics coming into contact with your bottom
- Wear loose fitting cotton underwear

- Avoid tight fitting underwear or trousers
- Women should wear stockings or open-crotch tights rather than regular tights.
- Wash your underwear in non-biological washing powder and try to make sure all traces of detergent are rinsed out
- Avoid sitting on plastic covered chairs for long periods

Creams and lotions

Never use anything on your bottom unless suggested by your doctor. This includes all creams, deodorants and talcum powders