



Colon & Rectal Surgery

Pruritus Ani

What is pruritus ani?

Itching around the anal area is a common condition known as pruritus ani. An irresistible urge to scratch is the result. It is most noticeable and bothersome at night or after bowel movements.

What causes this condition?

Several factors may be at play. A common cause is excessive cleaning of the anal area. Moisture around the anus from excessive sweating or moist, sticky stools is another cause.

In some people, a loose and/or irritating stool leading to this condition may be the result of a high intake of liquids. In addition, drinking certain beverages, including alcoholic beverages (especially beer), milk, citrus fruit juices and drinks containing caffeine (such as coffee, tea and cola) may aggravate the anal area.

Similarly, eating certain foods may lead to this condition. Such foods include chocolate, fruits, tomatoes, nuts and popcorn.

Rare causes of pruritus ani include pinworms, psoriasis, eczema, dermatitis, hemorrhoids, anal fissures, anal infections and allergies.

Does pruritus ani result from lack of cleanliness?

Cleanliness rarely is a factor. However, the natural tendency once a person develops this itching is to wash the area vigorously and frequently with soap and a washcloth. Unfortunately, doing so almost always makes the problem worse by damaging the skin and washing away protective natural oils.

What can be done to stop the itching?

A careful examination by a colon and rectal surgeon or other doctor may identify the exact cause for the itching. Your physician can recommend treatment to eliminate the specific problem. Treatment includes these four points.

1. Avoid further trauma to the affected area:
 - Do not use soap of any kind on the anal area.
 - Do not scrub the anal area with anything—even toilet paper.
 - For hygiene, use wet toilet paper, baby wipes or a wet washcloth to blot the area clean. Never rub the area.
 - Try not to scratch the itchy area. Scratching produces more damage, which makes the itching worse.
2. Avoid moisture in the anal area:
 - Apply either a few wisps of cotton, a 4x4 gauze pad or cornstarch powder to keep the area dry.
 - Avoid all medicated, perfumed and deodorant powders.
3. Limit medications to those prescribed by your doctor
 - Use these medications only as directed.
 - Apply prescription medications sparingly to the skin and around the anal area—never rub them in.
4. Avoid excess fluids and the foods previously mentioned.
 - In most instances, 6 glasses of fluid a day is adequate. There usually is not any health benefit to drinking more than this amount.

How long does treatment usually take?

Most people experience some relief from itching within 1 week. Complete cure usually takes 4-6 weeks. A follow-up appointment with your colon and rectal surgeon may be recommended to prevent recurrence of pruritus ani.

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