

Pruritus Ani (Anal Itching)

Itching in the anal area is a common, annoying condition, often more noticeable at night. It is perpetuated by the trauma of scratching or rubbing the skin while cleaning the area.

Occasionally there may be a specific underlying medical condition responsible for this itching. However, in most cases it is due to excessive moisture in the area, either from sweating or a vaginal or anal discharge. The aim of treatment, therefore, is to keep the anal skin dry and to avoid any trauma to the skin.

Instructions for Managing Anal Itching

1. DO NOT SCRATCH!
2. You *cannot* sterilize the anal area. Therefore, clean the anal skin with water only. Avoid soaps or perfumed products, as the chemicals in them may further damage the skin. Do not rub vigorously. Gently cleanse the area, then dry it thoroughly.
3. After bowel movements, use wet toilet paper, baby wipes, or wet cotton to clean the anal area, then throw it away. Do not leave any wet product on the skin. Gently dry the skin.
4. Place a small piece of cotton at the anal opening. This should be changed when it becomes moist. This will keep the moisture on the cotton and not on your skin. **THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP IN CONTROLLING ANAL ITCHING.** A feminine pad is not a substitute for the cotton.
5. A Sitz bath is soothing and may be used twice a day. Dry the skin when finished.
6. Cornstarch will help keep the skin dry. Avoid medicated or perfumed powders.
7. A hydrocortisone cream is often useful initially to help control the itching. However, it should be avoided on a long term basis, as this, too, may cause skin problems.
8. A bulk laxative, such as Konsyl, absorbs water from the stool and helps with itching. Use 1 teaspoon a day in juice or water.
9. Certain factors in the diet will contribute to anal itching. Most common are caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea, and cola, spicy foods, citrus products, milk, tomatoes (ketchup), chocolate, nuts, beer, and popcorn.
10. Do not expect miracles overnight. This problem did not arise overnight, nor will it be cured overnight. Be patient and follow these instructions.
11. In the more unusual cases that do not respond to these measures after an adequate trial, there may be an underlying medical cause for the itching. Further testing may need to be done at that point.