

What is pruritus ani?

Pruritus ani means 'itchy bottom' in latin. Although itching is one of the commonest symptoms, irritation, 'sweaty bottom', discomfort, pain and even a little bleeding may occur all due to the same cause.

It is due to Inflammation in the skin around the back passage (anus).

Why does it happen?

Skin conditions

In some people, the skin around the anus is affected by a condition such as eczema or psoriasis and this makes it prone to inflammation. The treatment is usually directed at the underlying skin problem such as steroid creams, ointments or tablets.

Infections

Occasionally the inflammation is due to an infection of the back passage or bowel.

In children and adults with young children, threadworms or pinworms can live inside the bowel. They are very easily passed around within families and can cause irritation of the skin around the anus when they come out (particularly at night).

Treatment for worms or other infections is usually simple and very effective.

Haemorrhoids

Haemorrhoids may cause an excess of mucus production from the back passage. When they enlarge, this mucus can leak out and cause irritation. Treatment for the haemorrhoids is often effective at reducing this discharge and reducing the inflammation.

'Normal Pruritus'

In a great many people, Pruritus Ani happens without any skin problem, infection, or haemorrhoids. Most people can suffer from mild irritation of the anus when certain conditions occur although some people are particularly prone.

How do I treat it?

Treating a cause

If there is a particular cause then obviously you will need treatment for this. This may need some tests of the back passage but these will be explained to you if necessary.

Stopping damage

It is important to reduce any damaging effects to the skin of the anus. There are several 'golden rules; for this:

- ❖ Try to avoid straining to pass motions as much as possible.

- ❖ Try to keep the stools soft but not liquid. A gentle laxative may be important at least temporarily.
- ❖ Avoid tight underwear or tight trousers such as jeans which may rub between the cheeks of your bottom.
- ❖ Avoid scratching if you can bear it – it only opens the skin up and sets the healing process back.

Avoid irritants

Several things tend to irritate the skin of the anus particularly when it is moist or cracked. Things to avoid using when the skin is inflamed include:

- ❖ De-odourants (spray or roll on)
- ❖ Talcum powder
- ❖ Scented soaps
- ❖ Chemical moisturisers

Careful cleaning

The skin of the anus is kept waterproof by a thin layer of oily skin cells on the surface. This barrier layers helps to stop the normal bile acids in the stools from getting into the skin and irritating it. Although it is important to wash away the traces of faeces after going to the loo, it is vital not to damage this layer during cleaning. After passing motions or when the bottom is sweaty or sticky try the following clean-up routine:

- ❖ Wash the anus – DON'T wipe using dry toilet paper. A bidet is ideal, second best is to wash the anus gently by hand with simple soapy water or if not, wipe gently with moist toilet wipes
- ❖ Pat the skin dry with a soft towel just for your bottom or let it dry naturally in the air for a few minutes.
- ❖ A small blob of Vaseline / petroleum jelly massaged into the clean skin will help to rewaterproof it and prevent chafing of the skin surfaces

Reducing irritation directly

Several ointments may be helpful in reducing the itching directly. Steroid creams are effective and can be used for short periods especially when the itching is severe but they should not be used for long periods or repeatedly as they only soften the skin and make it more prone to future problems.

Haemorrhoid creams usually contain soothing ingredients as do creams such as sudocrem. They are particularly helpful in the early stages of treatment.



Pruritus Ani

Patient Information

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