

Pruritus Ani

What is Pruritus ani?

Pruritus ani refers to intense itching (pruritus) around the anal region (ani). It affects up to 1 in 20 people, is much more common in men, and in those aged between 40 and 60 years old.

The main symptom is an intense urge to scratch your anus, which is more common after passing faeces and during the night. There are many possible causes, although in up to 1 in 4 people no definitive cause can be identified. If no cause is found the condition is known as 'idiopathic pruritus ani'.

What causes Pruritus ani?

Bowel causes

- Leakage of stool. Itching normally occurs within 6 hours and is relieved by washing. Itching is more common in people who suffer from loose stools, anal sphincter problems, or incontinence. Skin can also be irritated by sweat and moisture.
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Other causes

- Allergic contact dermatitis. This is a ski

1) Getting rid of irritants

These include creams, soaps, bubble baths, and scented toilet paper. After using shower gels and soaps the skin should be rinsed thoroughly with a shower head. Clothes should be washed in non-perfumed detergents. If the itch worsens after use of wet wipes they should be discontinued. It can be helpful to avoid foods known to irritate (see box) - your doctor may suggest keeping a diet diary to track your symptoms and help identify any foods which may be worsening the condition.

2) General measures

After toileting, a bidet or shower head should be used to wash around the affected area without soap, and then the skin carefully dried with a hair-dryer or clean towel. Cleansing may be most effective if performed whilst squatting to expose the area. Aqueous creams or emollients should be applied as directed by your doctor. Ensure the skin is dry before putting on underwear. Sudden, severe itching usually implies leakage of stool, and in this case, thorough cleansing is the most effective treatment.

If you are going out, you can carry a small container of an oil based preparation or aqueous cream, which can then be squeezed onto cotton wool to clean the area. If sweating is a problem, cotton wool can also be placed in the anal region to absorb excess moisture. Scratching the area should be avoided and keeping your fingernails short may

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