

## PRURITUS ANI (RECTAL ITCH)

### What causes Pruritus Ani?

Itching of the skin about the anus (opening of the rectum) is a common complaint. The cause of pruritus ani may be difficult to determine, thus making it a difficult condition to treat. The skin is exposed to irritating digestive products in the stool; this may lead to an itchy rash, especially when stools are frequent. Often, the rash is worsened by vigorous use of toilet tissue or scrubbing with soap or water. Pruritus ani is a self-perpetuating condition: scratching causes further irritation, which becomes a new source of itching.

Anal itching is usually an isolated skin complaint in otherwise healthy persons, but in some people, it is part of a disorder involving other areas of the skin. Whether pruritus ani is an isolated problem or part of another skin disorder, irritation from stools and from cleansing after bowel movements keeps the rash going. You may find that coffee and spicy foods make it worse. These foods irritate the digestive tract and increase the number of stools or amounts of mucus (liquid) secreted from the rectum.

### Treatment

There are several strategies, which can help in the management of pruritus ani. These include:

- Gently cleaning the anal area with water after each bowel movement and at bedtime. If a mild soap is also used, it must be rinsed off completely. The area should be dried gently, avoiding hard rubbing. Patting with a dry pad or using a hair dryer on a low setting can accomplish this. When away from home, this process can be accomplished using damp toilet tissue.
- Wearing cotton underwear can help. If necessary, a cotton tissue placed on the anal area may help to absorb moisture.
- Perfumes and powders should be avoided in the area around the anus.
- For people using any medicated creams or wipes who are experiencing worsening symptoms, these products should be discontinued.
- Any foods which appear to cause worsening symptoms (for example, tomatoes, spicy foods, dairy products, coffee, or beer) should be avoided.
- Since scratching and rubbing are the main reasons for continuation of pruritus ani symptoms, people with this condition should NEVER SCRATCH. Cotton gloves worn while sleeping can reduce the damage caused by scratching when asleep.
- A small amount of 1% hydrocortisone cream (available without prescription) can be applied to the area around the anus for up to two weeks. This can help start the healing process. After two weeks, this should be replaced by a soothing ointment such as Vaseline or Aquaphor after bowel movements and at bedtime.
- For itching which is a problem at bedtime, using a sedating antihistamine such as diphenhydramine (generic for benadryl) taken about 30-60 minutes before bedtime can decrease scratching and promote sleep.
- People who do not have improvement after using these measures for 3 weeks should return for reevaluation.

### Test Results and Advice Nurse

Please call the nurse for test results and advice: 863-4463

### Appointments

Appointments can be made in person or by phone. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call and cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

To schedule or cancel appointments, call: 863-0774

**For more information about health care issues, visit the UHS Web site at [www.sa.psu.edu/uhs](http://www.sa.psu.edu/uhs)**

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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