



Pruritis Ani is a common condition that causes itching or irritation around the anus. There are many possible causes and these usually relate to problems within the anal canal but may be caused by certain skin conditions. As the result of leakage of faecal material or liquid mucus, from the anal canal irritation of the skin outside the back passage may occur.

## Treatment

Pruritis ani is difficult to treat. It may take many months of care and attention to improve the condition. Your surgeon will have evaluated the rectum and lower large bowel to ensure there are no underlying problems, such as haemorrhoids or polyps which require treatment. In some cases the treatment may have already been carried out but attention to treatment of the skin of the peri-anal region is now particularly important. The management of the skin condition is multi-factorial and requires a combined approach to treat what may be considered similar to nappy rash. With this in mind, it is crucially important that the skin of the peri-anal region is not exposed to any irritants that may cause further injury or prevent pruritis from improving.

- All topical agents applied to the peri-anal region should be ceased immediately with the exception of barrier creams, such as Sudocrem and Drapolene. Specialist dermatological preparations may be used at a dermatologist's discretion.

- The peri-anal region should be kept as clean as possible at all times using either a shower or bidet after evacuation of the bowels or, where not possible, the use of hypoallergenic wet wipes similar to those used for babies in nappies. (Should itching worsen after the use of wet wipes, they should be discontinued and instead water soaked cotton wool buds used to clean the peri-anal region). Ordinary toilet tissue of any kind should be avoided. The peri-anal area should be cleaned daily in the shower or bath but no soaps or detergents of any kind should be used to assist with cleaning the area, water alone will suffice. It is very important to ensure that hair is not washed in the bath and that all bath salts and bubble baths are avoided.

After washing, the peri-anal area may be dried by gentle patting with a soft towel or a hair dryer on a low heat setting.

- Patients often find that night times are the worst for the sensation of extreme irritation at the anal margin and a desire to itch the area may become irresistible. An over the counter antihistamine (which may have drowsy making side effects), taken just before bed time, is an ideal way of improving the sensation of itching as well as assisting with sleep. The purchase of cotton gloves from the chemist to wear at night is also useful to prevent further unintentional damage to the peri-anal skin whilst asleep.

- Occasionally the insertion of a small plug of cotton wool into the anal canal may be enough to control mucus or soft stool leakage on to the peri-anal area. A small piece of cotton wool pushed inside the anal canal will not feel uncomfortable and will always be passed at the time of the next bowel evacuation without problem.

- Patients should wear loose fitting cotton underwear which is changed daily and should avoid tights, tight trousers or jeans and, where possible, prolonged periods of sitting. Clothes should be washed in a non biological washing powder.

- Diets high in fibre may be make the stools softer and more likely to cause leakage at the anal margin. Avoiding bran, cereals, muesli, beans, pulses and nuts as well as modifying intake of fruit and vegetables, particularly those with skins, may improve the consistency of stools and decrease discharge from the anal canal.

- Drinks to avoid include alcoholic drinks with high yeast content, such as real ales, coffee, chocolate and fruit juices. Other foods to avoid if possible include milk products, peanuts and spicy foods.

#### **Medication Induced Conditions**

Steroids, laxatives, Colpermin, antibiotics may all contribute to developing pruritis ani.

#### **Other Conditions that may cause Perianal Pruritis Ani**

These conditions should be identified and treated by your hospital doctor.

- Candida infection is very uncommon but easily treated with antifungal ointments.

- Threadworms can infect multiple family members and are easily treated.

- Sexually acquired bacterial and viral infections.

- Allergic contact dermatitis often occurs as a result of the use of multiple topical creams available over the counter at Chemists.

- Psoriasis

- Lichen Planus