

Pruritus Ani

What is a pruritus ani?

Itching around the anal area, called **pruritus ani**, is a common condition. This condition results in an irresistible urge to scratch one's bottom. This is usually most noticeable and bothersome at night, or after bowel movements.

What causes this to happen?

Several factors can be at fault. Moisture around the anus from excessive sweating, or from moist, sticky stools is one factor. In some people, a high intake of liquids can cause a loose, irritating stool. Other possible causes or contributing factors include pinworms, psoriasis, eczema, dermatitis, hemorrhoids, anal fissures and anal infections.

Does this come from not keeping my anal area clean enough?

This is almost never a factor. However, the natural tendency is to wash the area vigorously and frequently with soap and a washcloth. These activities almost always make the problem worse, not better, by damaging the skin and washing away protective oils.

How can a doctor determine what is causing the itching in my case?

A careful examination may show a definite cause for the itching, in which case a treatment can be directed specifically to eliminate the problem.

What can be done to make this itching go away?

There are 4 parts to a good treatment plan.

1. **AVOID FURTHER TRAUMA.**
 - a.) Do not use soap of any kind on the anal area.
 - b.) Do not scrub the anal area with anything (even toilet paper), and avoid rubbing.
 - c.) For hygiene, use wet toilet paper and blot the area clean, do not rub.
 - d.) Try not to scratch the itchy area. This can lead to more damage, which may make the itching worse.
2. **USE 2.5 % HYDROCORTISONE CREAM** as prescribed. Apply this cream *sparingly* to skin around the anal area three times daily using the finger tip.
3. **AVOID MOISTURE** in the anal area.
 - a.) Use either a few wisps of cotton, or some corn starch to keep the area dry.
 - b.) Avoid all medicated, perfumed, and deodorant powders.
4. **AVOID EXCESSIVE FLUID IN THE DIET.** A maximum of six glasses of fluid daily is reasonable. There normally is no health benefit to drinking more fluid than this in the course of a day.

How long does this treatment usually take?

Most people experience improvement within a week, when they follow the instructions outlined above. Although these symptoms almost always disappear within 3-4 weeks, some patients may need treatment for a longer period of time. You may find that you need to repeat these steps from time to time for recurrent symptoms.