

General Surgery

Pruritus ani

The golden rules for an itchy bottom

What is pruritus ani?

Pruritus ani is an intense itching around the back passage (anus). It is a very common condition.

The following advice is often helpful for controlling your symptoms.

Don't rub or scratch

Be gentle with the skin around your bottom. Wipe it gently with soft paper or medicated 'wet wipes' (especially good if you are away from home). Don't rub or scratch when you get itchy, especially at night.

Keep the area clean

Wash your bottom with warm water after every bowel movement. Also, wash just before bed and first thing in the morning. Avoid hot water as this can irritate the skin.

Avoid soaps and shower gels

Plain water is all you need to clean the area around your bottom. Using soaps or gels on an itchy bottom can lead to allergies that make the itching worse.



Patient Information

Dry gently

Dry gently with a soft towel or soft paper. **Do not rub.** A hairdryer on medium heat is the gentlest way to dry thoroughly.

Avoid moisture

Moisture will make the itching worse. Keep the area as dry as possible. Wear loose cotton underwear and avoid tight synthetic (nylon/polyester) clothing.

Freely circulating air will help to keep things dry. Sweat, leakage from your bottom or wet pads can make things worse. Avoid wearing tights.

Cotton wool pad

If you tend to get sweaty or leak a bit from your bottom, a small pad of cotton wool against the opening of the anus can absorb the moisture. A 3 - 6cm strip of wool should be enough. Change the pad each time you wash.

Avoid perfumed talcum powder

This can cause an allergy and tends to crust together and get stuck in the skin crevices. Non-perfumed is OK, but special drying powders may be better. They can be used with the cotton wool pad.

Avoid ointments and creams

These all tend to make the skin around the anus soggy and can cause allergies.

Occasionally your doctor may prescribe a cream or ointment for a specific reason. But it should be used for a limited duration.

Keep your stools (poo) soft

Hard stools can tear the anal skin. Straining to pass a stool can also make things worse by irritating piles. Spicy foods, tea, coffee, coke, beer, wine, and chocolate can all make an itchy bottom worse. Avoid them if you can.

Patient Information

But not too soft

After very loose stools, it can be difficult to clean your bottom gently. This can increase the number of times a day you need to wipe your bottom.

As things improve, you can relax this strict routine. But remember to keep the area dry and clean, and avoid damaging the skin with rubbing or scratching.

If the itching recurs, then the Golden Rules should be recommenced immediately till the irritation is controlled.

More information

If you have any other questions or would like further information, please call the Colorectal Surgery Team on 024 7696 6102.

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