

Pruritus Ani

WHAT CAUSES PRURITUS ANI?

Itching of the skin about the anus (opening of the rectum) is a common complaint. 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 and water. Do **not** over clean!

Anal itching is usually an isolated skin complaint in otherwise healthy persons, but in some 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 cleaning 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 amount of mucus (liquid) secreted from the rectum.

TREATMENT

Treatment is intended to reduce irritation of the anal skin. Unfortunately, it is impossible to eliminate all irritation, since it is impossible to avoid contact of the stool with inflamed skin. Careful, thorough, gentle cleansing after bowel movements is *very* important. After your bowel movement, place Balneol[®] on toilet paper and use that to clean the stool off of the anus. Balneol[®] is a product designed specifically for gentle cleaning of the anus of vagina and is available at on line pharmacies or some local pharmacies without a prescription. Alternatively you may use toilet paper moistened with lukewarm water, as dry toilet paper does not cleanse as well as wet and also irritates your skin. Never use soap on the anal area. Cleansing with plain water, in either the shower or the bathtub, will do the job. Cetaphil Cleansing Lotion[®] or Aquanil[®] are alternative gentle cleansers that may be used if you do not want to purchase Balneol[®].

You will be given a soothing preparation such as 0.5-1% hydrocortisone ointment, which you should apply thinly with your fingertips after each bowel movement, at bedtime, and at other times during the day as directed. *Do not apply any other remedy, suppository, or medicine to your rash.* Only the prescription medicine, water, moist toilet paper, and clean underwear should ever touch inflamed anal skin.

Pruritus ani is frequently stubborn and requires months of local medication and gentle skin care. Pruritus ani often comes back. Therefore, do not throw your medicines away when you are free from itching, but keep them on hand in case your trouble returns. Some persons need to continue using the medication once or twice daily indefinitely, since the itching returns whenever they stop. Anyone who has had pruritus ani should, for at least one year, keep soap off the anal skin and use only wet toilet paper for cleansing after bowel movements. If the medicine no longer controls your rash, please return.