Treatment of Pruritus Ani or Anal Irritation

Pruritus Ani is itching or irritation around the anus. Often it is most noticeable after bowel movements or at night. Common causes include excessive cleaning of the anal region, moisture from sweat or moist stool, or sticky stools. Certain foods and beverages can make the itching worse. Less frequent causes of anal itching include pinworms, psoriasis, dermatitis, eczema, hemorrhoids, fissures, infections or allergies.

**Itching**

Do not scratch. If you are unable to bear the itching, pinch the area through clothing. Keep your fingernails short. Some foods, creams or soaps make the irritation worse and are to be avoided. If necessary, wear gloves during the night to prevent yourself from scratching.

**Cleansing**

Gently cleanse the area with water, morning and night and after each bowel movement. Moistened facial tissues may also be used but do not use dry toilet paper or wash cloths. Blot or dab the area, do not rub. Pat to dry.

**Baths**

Take warm tub baths after each bowel movement (when possible) and two times each day for 10 minutes. Do not use any oils or salts in the water. Use only non-allergenic soap such as Neutrogena. Avoid the use of perfumed soap.

Especially avoid rubbing the bar of soap on the anal area or rubbing the itching area with a washcloth. Soap is very irritating. Leftover soap may collect in the folds of the skin and cause irritation. Avoiding soap completely is the best. Rinse off and then gently pat the area dry or use a hair dryer.

**Clothing**

Wear loose, cotton underwear, without elastic leg binding if possible to allow more air flow. Avoid nylon and wool contact with the anal area. Avoid girdles and corsets that push the buttocks together.
**Pads**

During the day, wear a thin strip of cotton or an opened piece of gauze sponge (non sterile) between the buttocks and up against the anal opening. This will absorb moisture including sweat and discharge. A thin strip may be drawn off the side of a roll of absorbent cotton. The cotton strip should be thin enough so that it is comfortable. Some doctors recommend cotton balls. Change the cotton or gauze frequently to keep clean and dry. Sanitary napkins or pads are very irritating.

**Medications**

- Do not use creams, ointments or oils around the anus unless prescribed by your doctor.
- Do not use laxatives unless specifically instructed to do so by your physician.

**Foods**

Some foods may be irritating. Coffee, dairy products and beer are commonly irritating. Try stopping these. Other foods to stop eating include chocolate, citrus juices and fruits, alcohols, tomatoes, including ketchup and sauces, nuts, popcorn, strawberries, colas, spices, & tea. Foods that cause gas, indigestion or loose bowel movements should also be avoided. It may be necessary to eliminate some or all of these to determine if they contribute to the problem. If this seems to help, try reintroducing one type of food at a time over two week intervals to identify which one is causing the irritation.

**Bowel Habits**

Having regular soft bowel movements is usually helpful. If you tend to have diarrhea or constipation, a fiber supplement may help you be more regular.

**Follow-up**

This program may be changed depending on your symptoms. Using the cotton strip or gauze is the last thing you should stop doing and the first thing to start doing again if your symptoms come back. This particular problem tends to recur. Return to see us if you are unable to control your itching or the situation worsens in spite of these measures.

*For appointments and any concerns, call (415) 885-3606*

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