

Pruritus ani – anal itching

This information sheet has been given to you to help answer some of the questions you may have about pruritus ani or anal itching. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is pruritus ani?

Pruritus ani is a common condition of persistent itching or irritation around the back passage (anus).

What are the symptoms of pruritus ani?

The main symptom is an urge to scratch your anus, which may be difficult to resist. This can lead to skin damage and possible infection in that area.

What causes pruritus ani?

It has many possible different causes, including piles (haemorrhoids) and certain skin conditions. However, the most common cause is a minor leakage (soiling) from the anus. If small amounts of stool (bowel motion) or liquid mucus leak from the anus, this can irritate the delicate skin around the anus.

What can you do to help yourself?

Pruritus ani can be difficult to treat, and it may take many months of gentle care to improve the symptoms. There are some things you can do to help:

- Pay special attention to hygiene. Be very careful to keep the area as clean as possible, ideally by careful washing and gentle drying at least once a day or after each bowel motion.
- If you do not have a bidet at home, you may find that sitting on the edge of the bath and using the shower head (if available) makes washing easier.
- If you are out or at work, take a small plastic bottle of water into the toilet to wash with after a bowel motion. Alternatively, non-alcoholic wet wipes can be used when you are not at home.
- Some people find that cold water is more soothing than warm.
- It is better to use water on your hand rather than a flannel.
- Wash without soap, as soap can sting. Never use soaps with a strong perfume or any antiseptics on your bottom. A very good alternative to soap is a light emollient such as aqueous cream, Zerocream® and Aquamax®. You can buy them from any pharmacy.
- Use very soft white toilet paper, moist toilet tissue, or baby wet wipes, if you do not have access to water, to clean after each bowel motion.

- If you do have a problem with leakage from the anus, a small amount of damp cotton wool on your fingertip may be used to gently clean into the anus to make sure there is no residue left behind. If your leakage continues after wiping, a small plug of cotton wool in the anus may stop the stool coming out to irritate the skin. Please talk to your nurse or doctor about this.
- Dry the area by gentle patting with a soft towel or tissue. Avoid rubbing. If you are very sore you may find that a hair dryer on a low setting is the most comfortable way of drying the area.
- Try to avoid scratching the area, however tempting this may be.
- Never use anything on your bottom except the treatment suggested by your doctor. This includes all creams, deodorants, talcum powder and antiseptics.
- Never put anything in your bath water. In particular, avoid all antiseptics, bath salts, bath oil and bubble bath as they can cause further irritation. You may use aqueous cream, as mentioned before.
- Wear loose cotton underwear and change daily. Avoid all man-made fabric coming into contact with your bottom. Women should avoid wearing G-string knickers and wear open crotch tights/stockings, as enclosed tights can cause sweating. You should also avoid tight trousers or jeans and sitting down on plastic chairs for long periods.
- Wash your underwear in non-biological washing powder, and make sure that all trace of detergent is rinsed out.
- Try to avoid constipation and straining on the toilet to get the stool out. Having five pieces of fruit and vegetables each day and drinking plenty of water should enable you to go to the toilet to pass stool every day. Please talk to your nurse or doctor for further information and advice.

Other suggestions your doctor or nurse has made for you:

Information for this leaflet was taken from The St Mark's Hospital and Association of Coloproctology of Great Britain and Ireland (ACPGBI) patient information series.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about pruritus ani, please speak to the doctor or nurse caring for you.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Further information

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

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t: 111

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w: www.nhs.uk

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t: 0848 143 4017

e: members@gstt.nhs.uk

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