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Pruritus ani

Itching of the skin about the anus (opening of the rectum) is a common complaint.

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, especially the vulva in [women](#) and [children](#).

Common conditions affecting the anus include:

- [Dermatitis](#)
- [Psoriasis](#)
- [Bacterial infection](#) including [streptococci](#) (streptococcal dermatitis) or [Corynebacteria minutissimum](#) (erythrasma)
- Yeast infection especially [Candida albicans](#)

The anal skin is exposed to irritating digestive products which may result in a rash (irritant [dermatitis](#)). The rash is made worse by:

- Frequent stools (diarrhoea)
- Straining at stool (constipation)
- Scratching
- Vigorous use of toilet tissue
- Scrubbing with soap and water
- Acidic or spicy foods.

Treatment

- Irritation of the anal skin needs to be reduced. It is impossible to eliminate it altogether because the stool continues to be in contact with the inflamed skin.
- Cleanse carefully, thoroughly and gently after bowel movements.
- Wash the anus in a bidet or a bucket of lukewarm water. Moistened tissues or soft toilet paper are next best. Use aqueous cream, mineral oil or other [soap-free cleanser](#). Avoid soap and rough toilet paper.
- Apply medicated ointment as directed.
- Ask your doctor to explain your treatment. Various different soothing preparations are suitable, including mild [topical steroids](#) and zinc paste. Strong steroid creams should not be applied for more than a few days.
- Do not apply any other remedy, suppository, or medicine to your rash. They can cause [allergic contact dermatitis](#).
- Avoid constipation.
- Eat plenty of high fibre foods (cereals, fruit and vegetables). Straining at stool causes cracks in the anus which are irritable and harbour bacteria.
- Avoid excessively loose or otherwise irritating motions.
- Don't over-indulge in spicy food, prunes, figs, orange juice, coffee or beer.
- NEVER SCRATCH! Scratching and rubbing is the main reason for the continuing pruritus ani.

Pruritus ani is frequently persistent and recurrent. The above advice should be followed indefinitely.

Related information

References:

On DermNet NZ:

Other websites:

emedicine:

- [Hemorrhoids](#)
- [Hemorrhoids](#)
- [Anal fissure](#)
- [Enterobiasis](#) (pinworms)

Books about skin diseases:

See the [DermNet NZ bookstore](#)

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DermNet does not provide an on-line consultation service.

If you have any concerns with your skin or its treatment, see a [dermatologist](#) for advice.

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