



Colon and Rectal Clinic

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Pruritus Ani

What is pruritus ani?

Itching around the anal area is called as pruritus ani.

What are the causes of anal itching?

The causes of anal itching are multiple. Increased moisture or irritation from seepage of stool or anal discharge can result in this problem. Certain foods and some common anal conditions such as fissures and hemorrhoids may also cause anal itching. The condition is often aggravated by the patient's attempts at vigorous cleaning including using soap, wash cloth, cleansing agents and topical applications. Vigorous washing take away the protective oil barrier and the cleansers may contain harmful chemicals. Scratching results in an itch-scratch cycle worsening the problem.

How do you treat anal itching?

1. Your colon and rectal doctor can eliminate some of the common causes with an examination in the office.
2. Avoid moisture in the anal area by using cotton underwear. In addition tuck a 4x4 gauze or a piece of cotton in the anal area. Avoid excessive washing, soaps and premoistened wipes that contain chemicals.
3. Avoid trauma and irritants. Mild soaps such as Dove and cleansers such as Balneol may be used. Use a hand shower or wet toilet paper to clean and pat it dry or use a hand dryer. Do not rub with a wash cloth. Resist the temptation to scratch.
4. Avoid use of medications other than those prescribed by your physician. You may be prescribed a steroid cream with or without an antifungal agent. Use the steroid cream for two weeks and taper it off. Prolonged use of steroids may cause thinning of the skin making it more vulnerable to trauma. Use barrier creams such as Calmoseptine to prevent skin irritation by stool, blood or sweat. Unlike the steroid cream, you may use the barrier creams for a longer period of time. Leave a piece of gauze, tissue paper or a cotton ball over the barrier cream.
5. Avoid food substances such as coffee, tea, alcoholic beverages especially wine, carbonated beverages, milk products, citrus fruits such as tomatoes, oranges, grape fruits and spicy foods. If symptoms resolve reintroduce each of these foods to evaluate whether they are associated with your itching and how much of it is required to cause the symptoms to recur.
6. A fiber rich diet can improve the consistency of the stool and may improve the irritation that results from stool seepage. Mushy stool gets trapped in the anal canal despite cleaning and works its way out with activity urging the patient to go back to the bathroom to re-wipe.

How long does it take to treat anal itching?

The symptoms do not resolve abruptly. It takes about 4-6 weeks for the treatment to work. A follow up visit may be required to check on the progress. Persistent symptoms may warrant further tests including a skin biopsy.