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**PATIENT INFORMATION:**  
**PRURITIS ANI**

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Pruritus ani (itchy bottom) is a common complaint which consists of itching of the skin around the anus. This can cause an irresistible urge to scratch and an itch-scratch cycle may develop which is difficult to stop and which leaves the skin area sore and painful.

The cause of pruritus ani may not be easy to determine. It can be aggravated by haemorrhoids (piles), skin tags, fissures or other local anal canal problems, or occasionally threadworms – all of which will require treatment. For most patients the reason for the itching is unclear.

Research has confirmed that the symptoms are provoked by tiny amounts of faecal debris which include digestive products, bacteria and bile salts. The irritation caused is often aggravated by vigorous rubbing with toilet paper or scrubbing with soap, or by the application of inappropriate ointments or creams. Even the dyes in coloured lavatory paper can exacerbate the itching.

By keeping the skin as free of these substances as possible the condition is nearly always kept under fairly easy control.

While you have symptoms, keep the area super-clean by washing with “Simple Soap” after every bowel action, and both night and morning. (The skin is so sensitive that even the perfumes in normal soaps can cause reactions). Make sure that all crevices of the skin are clean. Rinse well and dry gently. Do not rub hard with a flannel or towel. A hairdryer may be helpful. Where washing is not possible away from home, use medicated wipes such as “Wet Ones”, “Baby Wipes” or “Moists”. Use soft white lavatory paper and consider using the wipes on a routine basis.

Avoid all ointments except Sudocrem. Many proprietary creams and ointments contained local anaesthetics which, although initially helpful, often cause sensitisation of the skin and an overall worsening of the problem. If any local treatment is required this should only be undertaken on the advice of your GP or specialist. An alternative to ointment is Perinal Spray which contains Hydrocortisone with some local anaesthetic. This can be obtained from Boots, but may require a prescription.

It also helps to keep the bowel action regular and smooth. Use roughage/fibre if needed, or a fibre supplement such as “Regulan”.

Wear loose clean cotton underwear. Avoid tight nylon garments that encourage sweating and may make the condition worse. Try to avoid sitting on vinyl or plastic seats for long periods of time.

Diet may be important in relation to anal irritation. Foods such as salted peanuts, peppers, curry, red wine, citrus fruits, bitter beer and others which cause “tongue tingle” can “tickle the tail end” a day or two later. Some people believe excessive

coffee may also be a factor. Learn to avoid foods which experience tells you cause trouble.

You may have to be slightly obsessive about your bottom for a while but as your symptoms improve you will be able to be less strict with these measures. If the symptoms recur simply revert to the above advice and things should improve.