Pruritus Ani

Pruritis ani means “itchy anus” in Latin. This condition causes irritation of the skin near the anus, resulting in a strong urge to scratch the area. In many cases, no specific problem is found to explain the itching. These cases are called “idiopathic” (from unknown cause).

CAUSES

There are several potential causes of pruritis ani, as follows:

- **Underlying conditions**: Common anal conditions such as hemorrhoids, anal fissures or anal fistulas can cause itching. These conditions can worsen when a person repeatedly scratches.
- **Excessive moisture in the anal area**: This may be caused by sweat or a small amount of residual stool or mucus.
- **Diet**: Coffee, tea, carbonated beverages, beer, wine, milk products, cheese, chocolate, nuts, tomatoes and tomato-based products like ketchup have been associated with pruritis ani.
- **Personal care**: When a person suffers from serious itching, there is a tendency to wash the area too much. Scented soap and lotions can be irritating. Also, excessive cleaning can remove natural barriers, making the problem worse.

TREATMENT

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A thorough examination by a colon and rectal surgeon may identify the cause of itching. In some cases, no underlying reason is identified. Treatment of pruritis ani involves preventing further irritation and moisture in the affected area and avoiding scratching.

- Do not use soap on the anal area.
- Do not scrub the anal area with anything including toilet paper.
- Rinse with warm water and pat the area dry or use a hairdryer set on “cool.”
- Use baby wipes or a wet washcloth, but only dab the area lightly and do not scrub it.
- Apply either wisps of cotton or a 4 x 4-inch gauze patch to keep the area dry.
- Avoid all medicated, perfumed and scented powders.
- Wear cotton gloves or socks on the hands at night to prevent scratching.

Medications

Use medications as directed by your physician. Apply prescription medications such as topical steroids sparingly to the anal area. Prolonged use of prescription or over-the-counter topical medications may result in irritation or skin dryness, making the condition worse.

POST-TREATMENT PROGNOSIS

Most people experience some relief from itching within a week. If symptoms do not resolve after six weeks, make a follow-up appointment with your physician. Recurring symptoms are not uncommon and patients may need to make long-term lifestyle changes to remain symptom free.

WHAT IS A COLON AND RECTAL SURGEON?

Colon and rectal surgeons are experts in the surgical and non-surgical treatment of diseases of the colon, rectum, and anus. They have completed advanced surgical training in the treatment of these diseases, as well as full general surgical training. They are well versed in the treatment of both benign and malignant diseases of the colon, rectum, and anus and are able to perform routine screening examinations and surgically treat conditions, if indicated to do so.

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