

Management of Anal Irritation

Information for patients



Good hygiene is very important. Keep the area clean by washing after every bowel movement and at night before going to bed. A shower or bath in the morning and at night before going to bed will help soothe itching. Do not use scented bath products or soap as they can cause irritation.

Portable bidets are available from chemists and on the internet, which can be useful if you want to freshen up when you are out and about. A shower jet is also a useful way of cleaning the area. Make sure all small particles of faeces are removed from the skin crevices around your anus. There are also other devices available to help keep yourself clean. Your GP or practice nurse will be able to give you more advice about what these are and how to use them.

Avoid rubbing the area with a bar of soap or a rough flannel. Soap remaining in the skin crevices can be very irritating. A few suds in the water and on your fingertips, a soft cloth, or cotton wool are all that is needed. Scratching at night can be avoided by keeping your fingernails short. You can wear cotton gloves if you scratch in your sleep.

If you are away from good toilet facilities when you have a bowel movement or pass faeces, use moist wipes, such as fragrance-free baby wipes, instead of toilet paper. These provide better, gentler cleaning than dry toilet tissue. Take care, as some wipes contain alcohol and will sting sensitive or raw skin. If you have no wet wipes or a damp cloth, you can moisten ordinary toilet tissue with tepid water. This will help you to get more thorough, gentle cleaning than with dry tissue.

Keep the area dry, and dab the skin gently with a towel or very soft toilet tissue. Do not rub. A cool hair dryer on the lowest setting is the gentlest way of drying thoroughly. **Make sure the heat is turned off or on the very lowest setting, to prevent burning your skin.**

Avoid excessive moisture and never leave a wet dressing on your anal skin. Wear cotton pants and avoid synthetic materials. Avoid any tight-fitting or constrictive undergarments that press your buttocks together, such as shapewear.

Free circulation of air will prevent moisture from building up and making your skin damp. For women, a loose skirt is better than tight jeans; in the home a long skirt and no pants is even better. Avoid tights; try to wear stockings or none at all. Men should avoid tight underwear, preferably wearing boxer shorts as they are less constricting and allow more air around the affected area. Trousers and shorts should also be loose-fitting.

Avoid ointment and creams unless specifically prescribed or advised by a doctor. Lotions may sometimes be prescribed in the acute stage of the condition. These usually need to be applied after cleaning and before air drying. Calamine lotion and zinc oxide are very cooling and dry to a powder. Witch hazel is also very soothing.

Eating spicy or hot foods (such as chillies) may cause anal irritation. You may also find that other foods might cause you discomfort after you eat them. You may find it best to avoid these foods.

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

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