

The causes and management of Anal Irritation

Anal irritation is principally a skin problem. Most people are aware of how rapidly a severe “nappy rash” will appear in a baby if it is left in a wet or dirty napkin for hours or even minutes. Anal irritation is frequently caused by a condition similar to a nappy rash.

It is started by the normal resistance of the skin being damaged by moisture or small particles of faeces that can lurk in the crevices of furrowed skin around the anus. The irritation makes you scratch which in turn damages the skin, breaking the surface and allows germs, which usually abound in the area, to gain access beneath the surface and aggravate the problem.

Furthermore, many people apply creams or ointments that they get from their friends, the chemist or even the doctor. These can damage the skin’s resistance or even produce an eczema-like rash similar to the type of skin allergy that can occur from perfumes or detergents. The principles of treatment are to keep the anal skin clean and dry, to avoid damage by scratching or rubbing and to avoid applying irritants.

THE TEN RULES:

- 1- KEEP THE AREA CLEAN BY WASHING** after every bowel action and night and morning. The nightly bath is particularly important if you itch at night. A bidet is ideal but sitting in the bath or bowl of water is a good substitute. A shower jet is also a useful way of cleaning. Make sure that all the small particles of motion are removed from the skin crevices around the anus.
- 2- AVOID RUBBING 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 the finger tips or cotton wool are all that are needed.
- 3- IF YOU ARE AWAY FROM HOME** or good toilet facilities when you have to pass a motion, use medicated wipes such as “Wet Ones” or “baby wipes”. These provide better, gentler cleaning than hard paper.
- 4- KEEP THE AREA DRY.** Dab the skin dry gently with a towel or very soft paper. Do not rub. A hair dryer is the gentlest way of drying thoroughly.
- 5- AVOID EXCESSIVE MOISTURE.** Never leave a wet dressing on the anal skin. Wear cotton underwear, never nylon. Avoid any firm foundation garment that presses the buttocks together. The free circulation of air will prevent moisture accumulating. A loose skirt is better than tight jeans. Avoid tights, use stockings or crotch less tights.

- 6- **AFTER DRYING GENTLY** keep a thin pledget of cotton wool dusted with powder against the anus inside the pants. The pledget should be about twice as large as a 50p piece and should be changed each time you wash.

- 7- **AVOID PERFUMED TALCUM POWDER**; this tends to collect into small solid lumps in the crevices and also the perfume may cause allergy. Zeasorb or other special drying powders are better. Baby powder may be tolerated but it is not ideal. Use a Zeasorb to dust the cotton wool pledget.

- 8- **AVOID OINTMENTS AND CREAMS** unless specifically prescribed by a Specialist. Any greasy preparation tends to keep the skin soggy, which is what we are trying to avoid. Many proprietary preparations are hyperallergenic and should be avoided. Lotions may sometimes be prescribed in the acute stage of the condition and are usually applied after cleaning, before drying. Silver nitrate or magenta paint lotions are often helpful but should not be used without medical advice.

- 9- **KEEP THE BOWELS REGULAR** and smooth with plenty of fibre (roughage, bran) in the diet. Some dietary items cause irritation or loose motions in some people, avoid anything that does this to you. Do not sit and strain for many minutes when passing a motion; take roughage if necessary.

- 10- **AS THE CONDITION IMPROVES** gradually reduce the strict routine described here but remember the principles of keeping the area clean, dry and avoid damage to the skin by rubbing or medications. If the condition recurs, as it may from time to time, start the routine again at once until the irritation is controlled.