Anal Itching

Itching around the anus is a common problem. It is usually a non-dangerous (*benign*) but bothersome condition. It often is caused by skin irritation from stool, moisture, soaps, or clothing. Other causes are pinworms, especially if the itching is worse at night. In adults, the itching may be due to hemorrhoids. In some cases, the cause is unknown. Itching usually can be controlled by keeping the anal area clean and dry.

CAUSES

- Loose or sticky stool from diarrhea or rectal leakage (*fecal soilage*).
- Hemorrhoids. They allow stool to stick to the rectal area.
- Certain foods. Be sure to discuss your diet with your caregiver.
- Dry skin or skin diseases can occur at the anus.
- Infections such as a local yeast infection or certain sexually transmitted diseases (STD's).
- Worms (*parasites*).
- Diseases of the anus. These include abscesses, fissures, fistulas or cancer.
- Sometimes a cause cannot be found.

DIAGNOSIS

- Your caregiver will take your history and examine you. A careful exam of the anus is important. Your caregiver will inspect the outer area of your anus and will do a rectal exam (feeling inside with a gloved finger).
- Sometimes your caregiver will need to look inside the anus. This is a simple procedure that may be a little uncomfortable but usually does not require anesthesia.
- If abnormalities are found, then a biopsy might be done or you may be referred to a specialist.

TREATMENT

The treatment of your condition will depend on the cause.

- Your caregiver will advise you on treatment of any disease found.
- If you have rectal leakage or loose stools, a diet high in fiber or a fiber supplement should improve your condition.
- You should avoid foods or substances that might be causing your itching.
- Gentle care of your anal area is important to avoid worsening the irritation.

HOME CARE AND PREVENTIVE MEASURES:

- **Do not** rub or scratch the area. This makes the itching worse. It could worsen conditions such as parasite infections.
- After every bowel movement and at bedtime, gently clean the anal area. Bathe or use moistened tissue or soft wash cloth. You also may use pre-moistened anal cleansing pads or tissues made for cleaning up babies. **Do not** use soap. Gently pat the area dry.
- Wear underwear made of cotton or with a cotton crotch. **Do not** wear tight fitting clothes or underwear that keeps moisture in.
- Avoid foods and beverages that may cause anal itching. Examples are beer, tea, coffee, milk, cola, tomatoes, citrus fruits, nuts, chocolate and spicy foods.
- Be sure you have enough fiber in your diet.
- **Do not** use products that may irritate the anal skin. These include perfumed or colored toilet paper, deodorant sprays and perfumed soaps.
- **Do not** use any medication on the anal area unless advised. Some products may make itching worse.
- It may take a few weeks for things to fully improve.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- The itching is not better in 3 to 4 days or is getting worse.
- The skin around the anus becomes red or tender. This may be a sign of infection.
- You have pain in the anus, especially with bowel movement.

SEEK IMMEDIATE CARE IF:

- You have increasing pain in the anus or in the abdomen.
- You have blood coming from the anus.
- You have pus or other discharge from the anus.
- You develop a temperature.

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