

## Anal Itch

Anal itch is an itch around the anus (the opening where stool passes). Anal itch is a symptom, not an illness, and it can have many causes. In most cases, a person with anal itch has no disease of the anus or rectum. Instead, the itch is a sign that the anal skin is irritated.

Anal itch is a very common problem that occurs in up to 45% of people at some time during their lives. Men are affected two to four times more often than women. People who are overweight, sweat a lot or wear snug underwear or stockings have an increased risk of anal itch.

### Causes

#### **Intense cleaning after a bowel movement.**

Although the anal area should be cleaned after each bowel movement, you must be gentle. Rubbing and scrubbing with soaps or other skin cleansers can irritate the skin and cause more problems.

#### **Stool on the skin around the anal**

**opening.** If the anal area isn't cleaned well after a bowel movement, a small amount of stool may be left behind on the skin, leading to anal itch. Less often, watery stools may leak out of the anus and cause anal itching.

#### **Certain foods and drinks that can irritate the anus.**

These include spices and spicy foods, coffee (both caffeinated and decaf), tea, cola, milk, alcohol (especially beer and wine), chocolate, citrus fruits, vitamin C tablets, and tomatoes. These foods can inflame the bowel and increase the number of stools or amount of mucus secreted from the rectum.

**Treatment with antibiotics.** Antibiotics can trigger anal itch by changing the normal health of the bowel.

**A skin allergy in the anal area.** This includes dyes and perfumes used in toilet paper, feminine-hygiene sprays, other deodorants, talcum powders, skin cleansers, soaps, and laundry detergents. It may also include suppositories, creams and ointments.

### Other Causes

- Hemorrhoids, skin tags, rectal fistulas, rectal fissures or (rarely) cancer
- Pinworms, scabies, lice, anal warts and skin infections due to yeast or fungus

### How to Treat and Prevent Anal Itch

Practice good anal hygiene. Gently clean the anal area after each bowel movement by using wet toilet paper (unscented and dye-free) or a wet washcloth. Wipe gently or blot the area. Never rub or scrub.

Try to use only water to clean the anal area, never soaps.

Wear loose-fitting cotton underwear.

If heavy sweat or moisture is of concern, try using a cotton pad, gauze 4X4s or sheets of toilet paper in the skin cleft to absorb moisture away from the anal area. Change as often as needed.

Avoid using medicated powders, perfumed sprays or deodorants on the anal area.

Avoid using over-the-counter products for treatment of anal problems, unless your doctor tells you to use them.

Eat a diet that is low in the foods and drinks known to cause anal irritation.

Drink at least eight (8 oz.) glasses of water daily.

Avoid constipation. Eat plenty of high fiber foods (cereals, fruit, and vegetables).

Try a stool-bulking agent such as Metamucil® (just one teaspoon per day) as it can help make the stool bulkier, which is often less irritating to the skin.

If you are taking oral antibiotics, eat yogurt to help restore the normal health of your colon. Also consider taking an over-the-counter probiotic.

### **Who to Call**

Be sure to discuss your treatment with your healthcare provider.