Pruritus Ani

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Department of Colorectal Surgery

ⓘ For more information, please contact the outpatient department at the hospital where you are being treated:

The York Hospital
Telephone: 01904 751154
Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE

Scarborough Hospital
Telephone: 01723 342026
Woodlands Drive, Scarborough, YO12 6QL

Bridlington Hospital
Telephone: 01262 423039
Bessingby Road, Bridlington, YO16 4QP

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What is Pruritus Ani?

Pruritus ani is a common condition causing itching or irritation around the anus (back passage). It has many possible causes, including piles and certain skin conditions. However, the most common cause is a minor leakage from the anus. If small amounts of stool (bowel motion) or liquid mucus (slime) leak from the anus, this can irritate the delicate skin around the anus.

What you can do to help yourself

Pruritus is often difficult to treat, and it may take many months of gentle care to improve things. There are some things that you can do to help.

Personal Hygiene

- Pay special attention to hygiene. Be very careful to keep the area as clean as possible, ideally by careful washing and gentle drying at least once a day and after each bowel motion

- If you do not have access to a bidet, you may find that sitting on the edge of the bath and using a shower head (if available) makes washing easier. If you are out or at work, take a small plastic bottle of water into the toilet with you to wash with after a bowel motion

- Some people find that cold water is more soothing than warm

- Wash without soap as soap can sting. It is best to use water on the hand rather than on a flannel. Never use soaps with a strong perfume or any antiseptics on your bottom

- Use very soft white toilet tissue or you may find damp cotton wool the most comfortable

- If you have a problem with leakage from the anus a small amount of damp cotton wool on your finger tip may be used to gently clean into the anus to make sure there is no residue left behind

- If your leakage continues after wiping, a small plug of cotton wool in the anus may stop the stool from coming out to irritate the skin

- Dry the area by gentle patting with a soft towel or tissue. Avoid rubbing. If you are very sore you may find that a hairdryer on a low setting is the most comfortable way of drying the area

- Try to avoid scratching the area, however tempting this may be. If you find that you are scratching in your sleep at night, get some cotton mittens (available from your chemist)

- Never use anything on your bottom except the treatment suggested by your specialist. This included all cream, deodorants, talcum powder and antiseptics

- Never put anything in your bath water. In particular, avoid all antiseptics, bath salts, bath oil and bubble bath

- Wear loose cotton underwear and change daily. Avoid all man-made fabrics coming into contact with your bottom. Women should wear stockings or open-crotch tights rather than regular tights, which can cause sweating. You should also avoid tight fitting trousers or jeans, and sitting on plastic chairs for long periods

- Wash your underwear in non-biological washing powder, and make sure that all traces of detergent are rinsed out

- Try to establish a regular bowel habit

- A diet high in fibre makes the stools softer and more likely to cause leakage. You can try to make your stools firmer and therefore less likely to leak, by cutting down the amount of fibre in your diet. This means avoiding foods like bran cereals, muesli, beans, peas, pulses and nuts. Moderate your intake of fruit and vegetables, particularly those with skins

- Avoid lagers and flat beers (i.e. those with high yeast content) as these can make the problem worse

- Avoid coffee, chocolate and fruit juices high in citric acid for the same reason

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact: Department of Colorectal Surgery, The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 721154.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website: www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/