

VII. BOWEL HABITS, *continued*

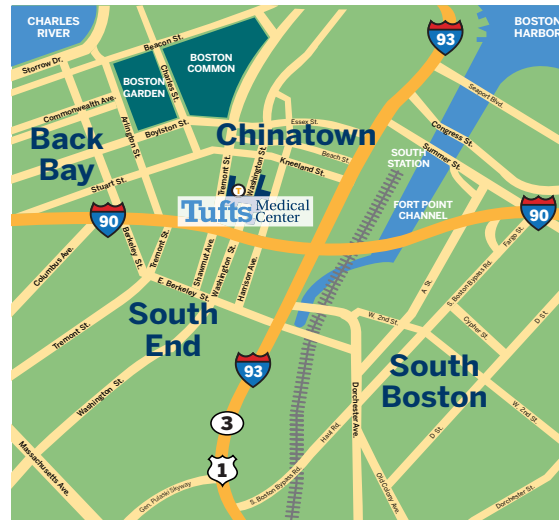
that is easy to pass. Most of these products contain psyllium which is a seed product. Many pharmacies and grocery stores have their own generic brands which work fine and are often much less expensive than the name brands. Some examples of these products are Konsyl, Metamucil, Benefiber, Citrucel (powders) and Fibercon (tablets). Wafers are also available. One tablespoon or one pre-measured package of the powder should be mixed with a glass of water or juice and should be taken once or twice each day. If using the tablet forms, 4-6 should be taken each day with 1-2 large glasses of liquid. Like a sponge, fiber will become hard and stiff if it dries out and if it does not have enough water in it. Therefore, at least 6 to 8 glasses of water and other liquids should be taken during each day, as well. Do not use active laxatives unless specifically instructed to do so by your physician.

IX. FOLLOW UP

This management program may be reduced depending upon the control of your symptoms. Recurrences are common. Plan to return if you are unable to control your itching or if the situation worsens in spite of these measures.

To make an appointment or ask a question, call the Division of Colon and Rectal Surgery at **617-636-6190**.

For urgent problems, call the Tufts Medical Center operator at **617-636-5000** and ask for the on-call physician for Colon and Rectal Surgery.



Tufts Medical Center is easily accessible by car from the Massachusetts Turnpike (Route 90), the Central Artery and the Southeast Expressway (Route 93). Tufts Medical Center is located in downtown Boston, in Chinatown and the Theater District and within walking distance of the Boston Common, Downtown Crossing and many hotels and restaurants. For directions, visit www.tuftsmedicalcenter.org/AboutUs/Directions.

Pruritus Ani

ANAL IRRITATION OR ITCHING

Symptoms and Treatment

Tufts Medical Center

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Tufts Medical Center

Pruritus ani or anal irritation and itching is extremely common. Most people experience these symptoms at some time in their life. Most of the time, this problem is minor and short-lived.

If it persists and is not treated appropriately, chronic changes may occur in the skin which may be much more difficult to resolve. Occasionally, dermatologic or intrinsic skin conditions, may be a source of symptoms. Most of the time pruritus ani will resolve with the following approach.

I. ITCHING

Do not scratch. If you are unable to bear itching, pinch the area through clothing. Keep your fingernails short. In addition, agents that promote irritation, such as certain foods, creams, talc and other powders, and soaps, are to be avoided. If necessary, wear gloves during the night to prevent yourself from scratching.

II. CLEANSING

Gently cleanse with water, morning and night, and after each bowel movement. Use unscented baby wipes or commercially available pads. Moistened facial tissues may also be used but do not use dry toilet tissue or wash cloths. Dab the area; do not rub. Pat to dry. A cleansing agent such as Balneol or Calmoseptine may be used but should be washed off completely when finished.

III. BATHS

Whenever possible, take warm tub baths or showers after each bowel action and two times each day for 10 minutes. Do not use any oils or salts in the water. Use only non-allergic soap such as Neutrogena or Basis. Avoid the use of perfumed soap. Especially avoid rubbing or itching the area with a washcloth or with a bar of soap. Soap is highly alkaline. Soap residue may collect in the folds of the skin, cause irritation and alter the normal acidity of the skin. Rinse off and then gently pat the area dry.

IV. CLOTHING

Wear loose, cotton underwear, preferably without elastic leg binding to allow enhanced local ventilation. Avoid nylon and wool contact with the anal area. Avoid girdles and corsets that bind the buttocks together. Avoid thongs.

V. PADS

During the day, wear a thin strip of cotton or an opened piece of gauze sponge between the buttocks and up against the anal opening. This will absorb moisture including sweat and discharge and keep the skin from rubbing together. A thin strip may be drawn off the side of a roll of absorbent cotton (Red Cross Cotton/Johnson & Johnson). The cotton strip should be thin enough so that it is comfortable. Do not use a cotton ball. Change the cotton or gauze frequently to keep clean and dry. Sanitary napkins or pads are not adequate since they are not placed between the buttocks and against the anal opening.

VI. MEDICATIONS

Do not use creams, ointments or oils around the anus unless prescribed by your doctor. Unless prescribed for a specific disorder such as inflammatory bowel disease, suppositories are generally of no use and may actually worsen the problem.

VII. FOODS

Most people do not need to alter their diet to resolve their pruritus ani. If the above measures are not enough, then the role of food should be addressed. Some foods may be irritants. The worst offenders are coffee, dairy products, and beer. Other foods that may cause problems include chocolate, citrus juices and fruits, alcohol, tomatoes (including ketchup and sauces), nuts, popcorn, strawberries, colas, spices, and tea. Items in the diet that produce gas, indigestion or loose bowel movements may also contribute.

It may be necessary to eliminate some or all of these to determine if they contribute to your problem. Try discontinuing some or all of these products for 1 to 2 weeks. If this seems to help, try re-introducing one type of food at a time to identify which one is causing the irritation.

VIII. BOWEL HABITS

Regularity of bowel movements is generally helpful. If you are prone to diarrhea or constipation, a fiber supplement may improve your habits. These products act as bulking agents and promote water retention in the stool, resulting in a larger, soft but formed stool

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