

PRURITUS ANI (ANAL ITCHING)

Thousand Oaks Proctology

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Dr. Rosenfeld has been in private practice since 1998 and spent 7 years at Cedars Sinai Medical Center. He was an active professor in the colorectal surgery fellowship program. Dr. Rosenfeld is now practicing in Thousand Oaks California. He is board certified in colon and rectal surgery

Dr. Rosenfeld finished his fellowship at USC in colon and rectal surgery in 1998. Dr. Rosenfeld is an expert in colonoscopy and proctology and has published a chapter on laparoscopic colectomy [Modern Management of Cancer of the Rectum: Chapter 9 : Laparoscopic Resections for Large Bowel Malignancy, Springer-Verlag Publications, London].

Dr. Rosenfeld specializes in colonoscopy and proctology including:

- Colonoscopy - Diagnostic and Surgical
- Hemorrhoid Disease
 - Burning
 - Itching
 - Bleeding
 - Pain
 - Lump in the rump
- Painless office hemorrhoid treatment
 - Sclerotherapy
 - Rubber band ligation
- Anal fissures and fistulas
- Perirectal abscess
- Pilonidal cyst and abscess
- Anal cancer and pre-malignant diseases of the anus
- HIV and AIDS associated anorectal diseases
- Hidradenitis

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DR. DAVID ROSENFELD



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PHYSIOLOGY OF PRURITUS ANI:

Anal itching or pruritus ani has many causes but the most common cause of itching is unknown or idiopathic (idiopathic pruritus ani). Men are affected four time more than women. Most people believe that itching is due to hemorrhoids and with hemorrhoid surgery the itching should improve. This is only true when the hemorrhoids are prolapsing (protrude from the anus) which causes an irritation from the fluid secreted from the anal mucosa. If a patient has prolapsing hemorrhoids with discomfort, bleeding and itching, surgically correcting the hemorrhoids will resolve the itching. When a patient has idiopathic pruritus ani with mildly enlarged or normal sized hemorrhoids, hemorrhoid surgery will not alleviate the symptoms. Other causes of itching include; fungal and yeast infections, pinworm (parasite) infections, wiping with poison oak or poison ivy, psoriasis, STD's (syphilis, herpes, warts, etc.), precancerous lesions and anal cancer.

Idiopathic pruritus ani is multifactorial and therefore there is no cure. First, itching is a skin problem. There will always be skin around the anus, therefore there is no cure. If you have an itch on a portion of skin on your body and we remove the sliver of skin that itches, the same area can itch as there is skin around the scar. We get itches all over our body because we are covered with skin. Other factors associated with itching include; stool consistency, coffee (including decaffeinated blends), chocolate, citrus fruits, tomatoes or tomato based products, poor hygiene, trauma from wiping and scratching, hemorrhoid mucous secretion, directly applying soap to the anus, and long-term steroid use. Studies have shown a direct correlation between the amount of coffee consumed and the severity of the itching. It is also well known that scratching is euphoric and gives a strong sense of relief. It is surmised that there is a component of addiction to scratching and therefore even if the itching completely resolves, at some time in the future it will most likely return.

Itching can be mild or severe. The itching is usually worse at night. Typically, over time the itching worsens. The process is cyclical and hard to break. The itching leads to scratching or excessive, aggressive, wiping which leads to abrasions and inflammation. The acute trauma to the skin leads to anal burning. As the wounds heal, Histamine and Leukotrienes are released. Histamine and Leukotrienes cause itching of the skin. When a patient scratches aggressively multiple micro cuts and abrasions develop which cause the severe burning. In a day or so the burning resolves and the itching improves. In the next few days as the multiple wounds heal, the Histamine and Leukotriene release causes a sharp rebound itching that is worse than before. This leads to aggressive scratching, causing more damage thus continuing the cycle of itching and scratching.



TREATMENT OF ITCHING

- **Dietary Measures**

- **Fiber** is a complex carbohydrate, which binds with water in the colon creating larger, solid, stool.
- What I have found over the years is that the majority of patients with idiopathic itching have soft sticky stools which require a lot of wiping, or even showering, after a bowel movement to get clean. Remember, the more trauma to the anus the more itching. Wiping a lot worsens the trauma. Furthermore, sticky stools, like peanut butter or toothpaste, are hard to clean. Toothpaste is a perfect example. The toothpaste tube is similar to the rectum; it is the reservoir that holds the toothpaste. The neck of the toothpaste tube with the threads is just like the anus. Once you squeeze the toothpaste onto the toothbrush, the toothpaste is now in the neck of the toothpaste tube. If you put the tube on the counter without the cap, in the morning you will find toothpaste on the counter. If you try to clean the neck there is still a lot of sticky toothpaste in the tube to leak out. This is exactly the same as the anus. With sticky stool in the anus, the anal canal it is too long to clean completely and the remaining sticky stool within the anus eventually seeps out coating the skin causing irritation and itching.
- The best way to combat this problem is to solidify the stool to the consistency of Play-Doh. We have all used Play-Doh. It is solid but soft and does not stick like toothpaste. If you were to put Play-Doh into a toothpaste tube and squeeze it all out you would not find Play-Doh on the counter in the morning. If your stool has Play-Doh consistency, after a complete evacuation, the whole volume of stool is removed with nothing left in the rectal vault or anus. Wiping should be minimal. Also, there will be nothing to seep out later. This is the “no wiper” bowel movement we all strive for. You know, the one that gives you a sigh of content and the urge to smoke a cigarette when you are done. Let me be clear, you do not eat Play-Doh to have these types of bowel movements. Fiber is what is necessary to change the stool consistency.

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Personally the bulking agent I recommend the most is **PERFECT P.O.O.P.®** which is raw psyllium formulated for me to taste better and go down smooth. No sugar, sugar substitutes, flavorings, colorants additives or preservatives. I take this every morning. When shaken (not stirred) with about 4-5 oz of juice or milk alternative it goes down smoothly and comes out long, solid, soft and clean. Other health benefits of psyllium include improving colorectal/anorectal health, lowering cholesterol, weight control, blood sugar control and improved immunity. One teaspoon of psyllium fiber adds 5 grams of fiber. It is important to drink enough water during the day in order for the fiber to work. Eating fiber without enough water can lead to constipation. It is recommended to eat 30-35 grams of fiber per day. The average daily American diet contains only 10-15 grams of fiber! It is also wise to eat foods lower in fat and cholesterol.

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- **Water** is very important as it is soaked up by the fiber making the stools bulky and soft. Water also is a natural lubricant and is extremely important for good bowel regularity. Think of the colon as a 6 foot water slide. Remember the days of sitting on a dry slide at the pool? You were stuck at the top because both the slide and the skin were dry and sticky. Pour one bucket of water on the slide and down we went. This is what happens in the colon if we are dehydrated. Water is removed from the colon to replenish our cells. This makes the stool and lining of the colon dry and sticky so it becomes hard to pass the stool. Drinking extra water bulks the stool and lubricates the colon making the stool slide through the colon smoothly and easily. Passing the large volume of stool is a breeze when we eat a lot of fiber and drink a lot of water. Caffeine and liquor are diuretics which increase urination causing dehydration. The colon's function is to reabsorb more water during times of dehydration. When this happens the stool becomes harder. Therefore, coffee, tea, caffeinated sodas, and liquor do not count as water. My advice to patients to improve their water intake is to drink water with each meal. This will add 3 glasses of water a day. Avoid coffee, tea and soda at meal time and only drink water. At least four 8 ounce glasses are necessary per day. Eating vegetables also adds water to the diet as vegetables are composed of water as well. As we get older and lose muscle mass it is important to drink even more water. Muscle holds water and as we lose muscle mass we can't use our muscle stores to recoup the water as the stores are too small. Therefore seniors are usually more dehydrated and must drink more water on a regular basis to keep hydrated.

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- **Micronized Diosmin** – Diosmin is an antioxidant and the active ingredient in immature (green) orange peels which shrinks hemorrhoids. In prospective randomized trials in humans and studies on animals, Diosmin was found to be safe and effective. Diosmin increased venous and lymphatic vascular tone which improved symptoms of both varicose veins and hemorrhoids. Diosmin binds to inflammatory proteins (Prostaglandins, Leukotrienes and Thromboxanes) and decreases their production. This leads to a decrease in chronic venous insufficiency (CVI) associated with symptomatic hemorrhoids which reduces their size. Hemorrhoids play a role in anal itching as they can secrete mucous which irritates the skin. Shrinking hemorrhoids naturally can help the itching. Also the effect of Diosmin on binding to Histamines and Leukotrienes (itching proteins) can also lessen the itching.



- **R.H.O.I.D. – AID®** is my private label which is developed and manufactured with the exact ingredient combination and same physical parameters of the ingredients found in Daflon, the pill used in the prospective randomized trials. Children, pregnant or lactating women and individuals using blood thinners should consult their healthcare practitioner prior to use. If you are using Diosmin make sure it is micronized to less than 4 microns. Diosmin tablets have a combination of Diosmin 90% and Hesperidin 10%. There are other micronized Diosmin products which are knock offs and use a Diosmin Salt which only micronizes the Diosmin to 50 Microns (10 times the size of the Diosmin in R.H.O.I.D. – AID®). It can help to reduce fissure symptoms by lowering anal pressure.
- In studies it takes about 4 days for Micronized Diosmin to decrease the size of hemorrhoids. For itching, in my experience, it takes 4-6 months for the itching to resolve when using micronized Diosmin.

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- **Caffeine** is directly correlated with idiopathic anal itching. The more caffeine the more severe the itching. Stopping caffeinated beverages completely will not stop the itching, however; lowering the amount of caffeine will improve the itching. Therefore it is not necessary to stop coffee or caffeinated drinks altogether. I do, however; suggest slowly lowering the amount of coffee and caffeinated drinks in one's diet. Chocolate also contains a lot of caffeine so those patients who eat a lot of chocolate will need to lessen the amount chocolate intake.
- **Tomatoes and Citrus** are associated with itching. It is thought the acidity of the tomatoes, tomato based products and citrus irritates the anal skin worsening the symptoms. If you eat a lot of these types of foods cutting down these foods is helpful.

- ***Avoiding Irritants***

- **Avoid soap** to directly cleanse the anus. Most patients feel that the anus is not clean without washing with soap. Soap is a drying agent and when applied directly to the anus causes irritation and cracking of the skin. Only a washcloth and water are needed to cleanse the anus. Remember, the oral cavity has many more harmful and aggressive bacteria than the anus and we don't brush our teeth with soap. Also avoid Witch Hazel as it is an astringent which dries the skin worsening the itching.
- **Bidet** – A bidet is a device which fits under the toilet seat and sprays water (hot, warm or cold) onto the anus after a bowel movement. This water jet cleaning obviates the need to use toilet paper or baby wipes. Bidets are very popular in Europe and are becoming increasingly popular in the US. A bidet can be purchased inexpensively and installed easily onto the cold water valve which fills the toilet. For more expensive bidets which spray hot and warm water a plumber will need to install a hot water valve to connect.
- **Baby wipes** should be used to wipe the anus instead of toilet paper if one does not have a bidet. Alcohol free, unscented baby wipes are not traumatic to the anus. Fragrances and alcohol are irritants and dry the skin. Toilet paper is made of wood pulp so even though it is soft it causes micro cuts when wiping, especially when wiping aggressively to scratch. Baby wipes are made of cotton and will not cause trauma to the anus.

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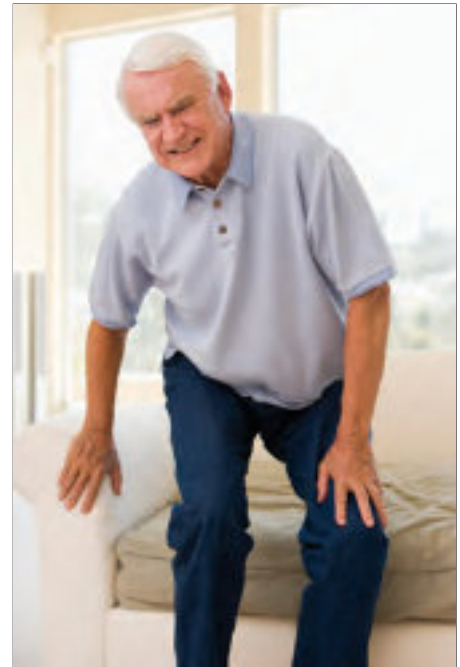
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- **Topical Treatments**

- **Steroid ointment** is very effective in controlling itching. Steroids decrease the inflammatory response which stops the release of Histamine and Leukotrienes. I prefer Analpram 2.5% as it has an anti-itch medication called Pramoxine which is mixed with a powerful steroid. This combination works so well patients can become dependent on the medication if they use it every day for over a month. Long term use of steroids causes thinning of the skin which leads to excoriation and abrasions. This leads to itching and the need to use more steroids. I recommend using Analpram 2.5% twice a day for 2 weeks and then discontinuing the medication.
- **Calmoseptine** ointment is a non steroid ointment that can be used as much as necessary. It is comprised of Calamine lotion, Zinc oxide and Menthol. The Zinc oxide coats the skin protecting it from irritants and the Calamine lotion soothes the itching.
- **Balneol** rectal lotion is another non steroid ointment which cleanses and soothes the anal skin. It is also free of astringents or alcohol and is safe to use for long periods of time.
- **Preparation-H:** A topical ointment which soothes the outside of the anus. Though it is believed that Preparation-H will shrink the tissue, there is no scientific evidence (that I am aware of) proving this phenomenon. I believe it is the soothing nature of the ointment that helps the symptoms. It is a benign ointment so if it works there is no problem with continuing its use.
- **Spectazole 1%** ointment is used for patients with fungal infections of the perianal skin.

- **Office based treatments**

- **Hemorrhoid sclerotherapy** helps to reduce the itching by decreasing the amount of mucous secreted from the internal hemorrhoids. Large inflamed internal hemorrhoids secrete mucous which mixes with the sticky stool allowing the stool to leak from the anus and coat the skin. Shrinking the hemorrhoids stops the mucous discharge. A substance (phenol mixed with olive oil) is injected into the internal hemorrhoids causing them to shrink. This procedure is done in the office and is painless!!



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L-Glutamine amino acid supplement for gas bloat with constipation, sticky stool or diarrhea. Gas Bloat with diarrhea or constipation is a very common problem in America. It comes from Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), now felt to be Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth (SIBO) or "Leaky Gut". The small bowel cells (Enterocytes) become inflamed and need nutrition to heal. L-Glutamine is the fuel or food for the enterocytes which leads to their healing. Once the cells heal the gut seals resolving the issues. My formula is pure L-Glutamine with tremendous gut healing, sealing potential. Take 2 grams twice a day and see the amazing results within 2 weeks.

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CONCLUSION

Anal itching is usually idiopathic which means there is no known single cause of the symptom. The problem is multifactorial and therefore is typically not curable unless a cause such as a yeast infection, sexually transmitted disease, pinworm, pre-cancer or cancer is identified. Multiple treatments are available and changing one's diet and cleansing habits are very helpful. Stool consistency is associated with itching so adding fiber to solidify the stool is very important. It is surmised that there is a component of addiction to scratching and therefore even if the itching completely resolves, sometime in the future it will most likely return.

Though the problem is primarily benign, cancer is associated with anal itching so it is strongly recommended to see a proctologist for an evaluation.