SYMPTOM

Itchy bottom

An itchy bottom is irritation or itching of the skin around the anus.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Itching or burning around your back passage

WHERE IT IS FELT
Skin around the anus

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Skin irritation, moisture, threadworms

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Fever with a painful, swollen, or draining lump

USUALLY LASTS
Days to weeks, depending on irritation or underlying cause

SEE A DOCTOR IF
It persists, keeps returning, bleeds, or changes the skin

Overview

An itchy bottom means itching of the skin around the anus, the opening where bowel movements leave the body. The medical term is pruritus ani .

The itch may be mild and occasional or strong enough to disturb sleep. It is a symptom rather than a disease. Common causes include moisture, traces of stool, skin irritation and threadworms. Sometimes no single cause is found.

Scratching can damage the skin and make the itching worse. This creates an "itch-scratch cycle," in which irritated skin becomes even more sensitive.

What it may feel or look like

The main symptom is an urge to scratch around the anus. You may also notice:

Pain, a lump, discharge or bleeding may point to another problem that needs assessment. Try not to assume that bleeding is caused by piles, also called haemorrhoids.

- Burning, soreness or stinging

- Red, cracked, thickened or damp skin
- Small scratch marks or spots of blood after scratching
- Itching that becomes worse after a bowel movement
- Itching at night, which can happen with threadworms
- Mucus, stool staining or difficulty keeping the area clean

Common causes

Skin irritation is one of the most frequent causes. Sweat, tight clothing, diarrhoea, small amounts of stool or bowel leakage can leave the area damp. Frequent wiping may then damage the skin.

Overcleaning can have the same effect. Scented soap, wet wipes, deodorants, bubble bath and antiseptic products may strip natural oils from the skin or cause contact dermatitis. Contact dermatitis is a skin reaction to something touching the area.

Other common possibilities include:

Less common causes include fungal or bacterial infections, sexually transmitted infections, inflammatory bowel conditions and skin disorders affecting the genital or anal area. Some medicines, including those that cause diarrhoea, may contribute.

Rarely, persistent itching with a sore, lump, ulcer or unusual skin change can be linked to a more serious condition. These changes should be examined, but most anal itching is not caused by cancer.

- Threadworms: small intestinal worms that often cause intense night-time itching, especially in children
- Haemorrhoids: swollen blood vessels that may cause itching, bleeding or mucus
- Skin conditions: including eczema and psoriasis
- Constipation or diarrhoea: either can make cleaning difficult and irritate the skin

When to seek medical care

Arrange a routine appointment if the itching does not settle with careful self-care, keeps returning or interferes with sleep. You should also book an appointment if you have:

Seek same-day medical care if you develop increasing pain with fever, a hot or swollen lump, or pus draining near the anus. These can be signs of an abscess, which is a pocket of infection.

Seek emergency help for heavy or continuing bleeding, black tar-like bowel movements, fainting or severe weakness. These symptoms need urgent assessment even if itching is also present.

- Bleeding, mucus or bowel leakage
- A new lump, rash, sore or change in skin colour
- Pain during bowel movements
- A lasting change in bowel habits
- Possible threadworms that have not responded to pharmacy advice

How the cause is found

A healthcare professional may ask when the itching began, whether it is worse at night and whether you have pain, bleeding or bowel leakage. Tell them about recent diarrhoea, new skin products, medicines and similar symptoms in household members.

They may examine the skin around the anus. Depending on your symptoms, they might gently examine inside the rectum with a gloved finger or use a short viewing instrument.

Tests are not always needed. A sticky-tape test may help find threadworm eggs. Swabs can check for infection. Blood tests or a small skin sample may be considered if symptoms persist or the skin looks unusual.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the cause. In the meantime, gentle skin care can reduce irritation:

A thin layer of a simple barrier ointment, such as petroleum jelly or zinc oxide, may protect irritated skin from moisture and stool. Ask a pharmacist which product is suitable.

Steroid like prednisone or hydrocortisone creams can reduce inflammation in some conditions, but using them for too long may thin sensitive skin. Follow the product instructions and seek advice if you are unsure or symptoms continue.

Threadworms may require an anti-worm medicine and household hygiene measures because eggs spread easily. A pharmacist or clinician can advise whether other household members also need treatment.

Haemorrhoids, infections and long-term skin conditions need treatment aimed at the specific cause. Avoid using several creams at once, as this can make irritation worse or make the cause

harder to identify.

- Wash with lukewarm water after bowel movements when practical
- Pat dry rather than rubbing
- Avoid scented soap, wet wipes, deodorants and antiseptics
- Wear loose, breathable underwear and change damp clothing
- Keep fingernails short and try not to scratch
- Use soft, plain toilet paper without repeated vigorous wiping

What to expect

Mild irritation may begin to improve within several days once moisture, harsh cleaning and scratching are reduced. Damaged skin can take longer to recover.

Symptoms may return if the trigger continues, such as ongoing diarrhoea, bowel leakage or exposure to an irritating product. Persistent or recurring itching deserves review rather than repeated self-treatment.

Common questions

Is an itchy bottom caused by poor hygiene?

Not usually. Traces of stool can irritate the skin, but excessive washing and repeated wiping are also common causes. Gentle cleaning is better than scrubbing.

Why is it worse at night?

Warmth, sweating and fewer distractions can make any itch more noticeable. Strong night-time itching can also occur with threadworms, particularly when more than one person at home is affected.

Can food cause it?

Some people notice irritation after particular foods or drinks, especially if these trigger loose bowel movements. There is no need to follow a highly restricted diet. A brief symptom diary may help identify a consistent pattern.

Can I pass it to someone else?

Skin irritation and haemorrhoids are not contagious. Threadworms and some infections can spread between people. Wash hands carefully and seek advice if household members develop

similar itching.

Sources

- NHS: Itchy bottom - symptoms, causes, self-care and when to seek help
- American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons: Pruritus Ani - patient information on assessment and management
- Merck Manual Consumer Version: Itching of the Anus - causes, warning signs and medical evaluation
- DermNet: Perianal dermatoses - skin conditions affecting the anal area
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: About Pinworm Infection - symptoms, spread and prevention of threadworms