



Perianal skin care for people with bowel problems

Why is good skin care important?

Anyone who has frequent bowel motions, diarrhoea or accidental leakage (faecal incontinence) may get sore skin around the back passage from time to time. This can be very uncomfortable and distressing. Occasionally, the skin may become so inflamed that it breaks into open sores which can sometimes be difficult to heal.

Taking good care of the skin around your back passage can help to prevent these problems from developing.

Why may I get sore skin?

There are several different reasons why your skin may become sore.

- Your bowel contains digestive juices which break down your food to enable your body to use the nutrients in it.
- Loose bowel motions (diarrhoea) will still contain these juices which will damage any skin which they contact.
- If you have faecal incontinence, the small quantity of juices left in even normal stool can damage the skin.
- If you open your bowels very frequently, repeated wiping can damage the sensitive skin of your anus.
- With some anal conditions, it is very difficult to wipe your bottom effectively - a little always seems to get left which can start to make you sore.
- Chemicals contained in the bacteria of the bowel motions can cause itching.
- The area around the anus can become infected.
- If you have incontinence of the bladder and bowel, you will be more likely to get sore.
- People who are not eating a healthy balanced diet, not drinking enough or not taking much exercise are more prone to soreness. As are people who are generally unwell, not very active or obese.

Tips to prevent soreness

It is often possible to prevent soreness with careful personal hygiene, even if you have a bowel problem. The following tips may help you:

- After a bowel action, always wipe GENTLY with soft toilet paper or alcohol-free moist toilet paper (available from larger pharmacies and some supermarkets). Discard each piece of paper after one wipe, so that you are not re-contaminating the area you have just wiped.
- Whenever possible, wash around the anus after a bowel action. A bidet is ideal (portable versions are available). If this is not possible, you may be able to use a shower attachment with your bottom over the edge of the bath. Or use a soft disposable cloth with warm water. Avoid flannels and sponges, as they can be rough and are difficult to keep clean.

- Plain warm water is best. Do not be tempted to use disinfectants or antiseptics in the washing water as these can sting, and many people are sensitive to the chemicals in them.
- AVOID using products with a strong perfume such as scented soap, talcum powder, deodorants on your bottom. If you use soap, choose a non-scented soap (e.g. 'Simple', or baby soap). Many baby wipes contain alcohol and are best avoided.
- Dry the area very gently. Pat with soft toilet paper or soft towel. Do not rub. If you are very sore, a hairdryer on a low / cool setting may be most comfortable.
- Wear cotton underwear to allow the skin to breathe. Avoid tight clothes that might rub the area. Women are usually best to avoid tights and to use stockings or crotch less tights instead. Use non-biological washing powder for underwear and towels.
- Avoid using any creams or lotions on the area, unless advised to do so by your Dr or Specialist Nurse. However regular use of a barrier cream is sometimes recommended in those prone to sore skin as it can help to prevent it. If you do use a barrier cream, choose a simple one (such as zinc and castor oil / petroleum jelly / Vaseline ©). Use a small amount and gently rub it in. Large amounts stop the skin from breathing and can make the area sweaty and uncomfortable. Make sure that the old layer of cream is washed off before applying more. Some people are allergic to lanolin, and creams containing this should be avoided.
- Your doctor or nurse may suggest using a barrier wipe/ spray (Cavilon) which forms a protective film over the skin, especially if you have diarrhoea and are opening your bowels very frequently (available on prescription).
- If you need to wear a pad because of incontinence, try to make sure that no plastic comes into contact with your skin and that you use a pad with a soft surface. The Continence Team can advise you on which pads are suitable.
- Whenever possible, eat a healthy, balanced diet, drink plenty and take as much exercise as you can. Certain food or drink makes soreness worse e.g. citrus fruits or spices. It may be worth cutting these out on a trial basis, and more permanently if this helps.

Note: Women are advised always to wipe front to back, i.e. AWAY from the bladder and vaginal openings as bacteria from the bowel can infect the bladder and vagina if you wipe from back to front.

If you are already sore

Follow all the advice above on prevention. In addition:

- You may find that damp cotton wool is most comfortable to use for wiping.
- Use a barrier cream or ointment as recommended by your doctor or nurse. If you have to choose your own, try Zinc and Caster oil, Sudocrem © or a small amount of Metanium ©.
- Try using a hairdryer on a low setting if drying the skin is difficult or uncomfortable.
- Do not scratch the anal area, however much you are tempted, as this will make things worse. If you find that you are scratching the area in your sleep at night, you may consider wearing cotton gloves in bed (available from your chemist).
- Try to allow the air to get to the anal area for at least part of every day.
- Low dose steroid creams may occasionally be prescribed to treat perianal skin irritation and are suitable for short term use but only with caution and under medical advice. Never apply steroid creams to broken skin or internally. Local side effects include burning and stinging of the skin, skin thinning, skin colour changes and worsening of any existing skin infections.
- Don't struggle on alone! Talk to your nurse or doctor, especially if your skin is broken. If you have persistently sore skin, you may have an infection which needs treatment, and there are other products which can be prescribed to help heal the soreness.

Useful Contacts:

Clare Horrobin

Clinical Nurse Specialist – GI Physiology

Good Hope Hospital

Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm Tel: 0121 424 7427 (Direct Line)

Additional sources of information

Peristeen Rectal Irrigation Coloplast Ltd

Charter Helpline: 0800 132787

www.coloplast.co.uk

Qufora Ltd

Tel: +44 (0) 800 612 90 90

info@qufora.co.uk

www.qufora.co.uk

Bladder and Bowel UK

Tel: 0161 607 8219

www.bladderandboweluk.co.uk

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