University Hospitals of Leicester
NHS Trust

Skin care advice for bowel incontinence

Pelvic Floor and Bowel Function

Information for Patients

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Why is good skin care important?

Anyone who poos often, has diarrhoea or accidental leakage of poo (faecal incontinence) may get sore skin around their bottom (anus) from time to time. This can be very uncomfortable and distressing. Sometimes, the skin may become so inflamed that it breaks into open sores. These sores can be difficult to heal. Taking good care of the skin around your bottom can help to prevent these problems.

Why may I get sore skin?

- Your bowel has digestive juices that break down your food. This lets your body use the nutrients in it. If you have diarrhoea/ loose poo these juices can start to damage your skin if in contact with it.
- If you have accidental leakage (faecal incontinence), the small amounts of juices left in even normal poo can damage the skin.
- Going to the toilet and wiping a lot can make the skin around your bottom sore. It can make the skin damaged and sensitive.
- Some conditions make it hard to clean properly, so a small amount of poo may be left behind causing soreness.
- Bacteria in poo and pee can cause skin itching.
- Sometimes, the area around the bottom becomes infected.
- If you have incontinence of the bladder and bowel, you will be more likely to get sore, as the pee and poo react together.

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- These people are more likely to become sore, those who do not:
  - eat a healthy balanced diet,
  - drink enough,
  - exercise,

  This is because these people are often unwell and not very active or mobile.

How can I prevent soreness?

You can often stop soreness by keeping the area clean. These tips may help:

- After going to the toilet, always wipe gently with soft toilet paper.
- Throw away each piece of paper after 1 wipe. This is so that you can keep the area you have just wiped clean.
- Whenever you can, wash around your bottom after a poo. You can do this using 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. They can be rough on the skin and difficult to keep clean. You may need to get creative if you are away from home. Some people find that a small plant spray, watering can or jug filled with warm water makes washing easy on the toilet or over the edge of the bath.
- Do not use disinfectants or antiseptics in the washing water as these can sting. Warm water is best.
- Avoid using products with a strong perfume such as scented soap, talcum powder or deodorants on your bottom. Choose a non-scented soap (like a plain soap or baby soap). Many baby wipes contain alcohol and should be avoided.
- Be very gentle when drying the area. Pat gently with soft toilet paper or a soft towel and do not rub. Treat the whole area as you would a new-born baby's skin. If you are very sore, a hairdryer on a low heat setting may be most comfortable. Please use it carefully and away from water.
- Wear cotton underwear. This helps the skin to breathe. Avoid tight jeans and other clothes that might rub the area. It is best to avoid tights and to use stockings instead. Use non-biological washing powder for underwear and towels.
- Avoid using any creams or lotions on the area, unless told to do so. A few people who are more likely to get sore skin find that using a cream regularly helps prevent this. If you do use a barrier cream, choose a simple one like zinc and castor oil. Use just a small amount and gently rub it in. Large amounts of cream 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 which forms a protective film over the skin, especially if you have diarrhoea and are going to the toilet a lot (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 Nurse can advise you on which pads are best.
- Whenever possible, unless you have been advised not to for other reasons, try to:
  - eat a healthy and balanced diet,
  - drink plenty,
  - do exercise such as a 20 to 30 minute walk most days.

  Some people find that certain food or drink makes them more likely to have soreness, especially citrus fruit such as oranges. It may be worth cutting these out on a trial basis and more permanently if this helps.

Note: We advice females to always to wipe front to back. For example wipe away from the bladder and vaginal openings. This is because bacteria from the bowel can infect the bladder and vagina if you wipe from back to front.

What can I do if I am already sore?

- You may find that using damp cotton wool is most comfortable 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 castor oil cream, Sudocrem® or a small amount of Metanium®. These are available to buy from your pharmacist. A barrier cream/stick can also be tried if poo is very loose. There are different brands available such as Cavilon™.
- If drying the skin after washing is difficult or uncomfortable, you may try using a hairdryer on a low setting. Please use it carefully and away from water.
- Try not to scratch your bottom as this will make things worse. If you find that you are scratching the area in your sleep at night, you may want to wear 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.
- Do not struggle alone. Talk to your nurse or doctor, especially if your skin is broken. If you have sore skin all the time you may have an infection. This needs treatment and there are other products which can be prescribed to help heal the soreness.

Contact details

Functional Bowel Service: **0116 258 3775**

Please leave a message and we will respond in between clinics if possible.

If you need advice about your treatment or side effects outside normal working hours, please contact your GP or **NHS 111.**

In a life-threatening circumstance call the emergency services on **999**. This will depend on the nature and urgency of your concern.

What should I do if I want more information?

Bowel and Bladder Community www.bladderandbowel.org/

Email: help@bladderandbowel.org

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