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Skin Care and Bowel Hygiene

Anyone who has frequent bowel movements, diarrhea, or bowel leakage (fecal incontinence) may experience soreness or skin irritation around the anal region. Occasionally, the skin can become so inflamed that it breaks into open sores. Prevent skin breakdown by following good skin care habits.

Cleaning and Washing Techniques

After having a bowel movement, men and women should tighten their anal sphincter before wiping. Women should always wipe from front to back to prevent fecal matter from getting into the urethra and vagina.

Tips for Cleaning and Washing

- wipe from front to back towards the anus
- always wipe gently with soft toilet paper, or ideally with moist toilet paper
- wipe only once with each piece of toilet paper so as not to re-contaminate the area
- wash in warm water alone or with a minimal amount of mild, fragrance-free soap
- use non-biological washing powder
- gently pat skin completely dry, avoiding rubbing
- if drying the skin after washing is difficult or uncomfortable, try using a hairdryer on a low setting (use very carefully)
- allow air to get to the irritated area for some part of every day
- use protective skin creams containing zinc as recommended by your doctor

What To Avoid

- baths with extra-hot water
- soaking for long periods of time in the bathtub
- disinfectants and antiseptics
- bath oils, bath salts, and talcum powder
- using plastic pants, pads, and sheets, which cause sweating
- scratching at the irritated area

Additional Tips

- some people find that citrus and acidic foods cause or worsen skin irritation
- eat a healthy, balanced diet that is high in fiber
- drink plenty of fluids
- wear cotton underwear to allow the skin to breathe
- talk to your healthcare provider about further treatment options; persistent problems need medical attention