

Peristomal Pruritus – When Itch Leads to Scratch

Abstract

Itching, also known as pruritus is the uncomfortable sensation causing the desire to scratch. When it is acute (time-limited), it may just cause a temporary annoyance. When chronic, pruritus may be difficult to treat and have more severe impact on the individual.¹ The physiology of chronic itch is a topic of interest to scientists who are investigating the neural mechanisms.⁴ NIH has funded researchers at locations such as Washington University in St. Louis, and University of California, Berkeley where they have “Centers for the Study of Itch”.⁴

Little is published in the literature about peristomal pruritus except in relationship to certain skin conditions such as candidiasis and dermatitis.² A common cause of peristomal skin complications is leakage of stool or urine onto the skin which people with ostomies sometimes ascribe as an itching sensation, this itching may not necessarily be a reflection of leakage only.

This poster presentation will examine peristomal pruritus in the absence of causation and discusses how a ceramide-infused barrier may have positive outcomes.

Background to the Problem

People with ostomies often report peristomal skin itching with no visible signs of skin complications, leakage, or skin deterioration. Skin complications are not always visible. Skin can itch even if it looks healthy. When asked about how often they felt the need to scratch, one study found 87% of people living with a stoma experienced peristomal itching.³ Nearly 3 in 5 people said they felt the need to scratch at least occasionally. About 16% of those said they experienced this feeling “frequently” or “very frequently”. (See Figure 1)

Now for the healthcare professional’s perspective. Among stoma care nurses that were surveyed, over 95% have had patients reported pruritus.³ Of those stoma care nurses, 27% said pruritus was the primary reason for the patient’s visit. When asked how bothersome this condition was for their patients, 7 in 10 nurses reported it was at least moderately bothersome - particularly in warmer weather with higher heat and humidity.³ (See Figures 2 & 3)

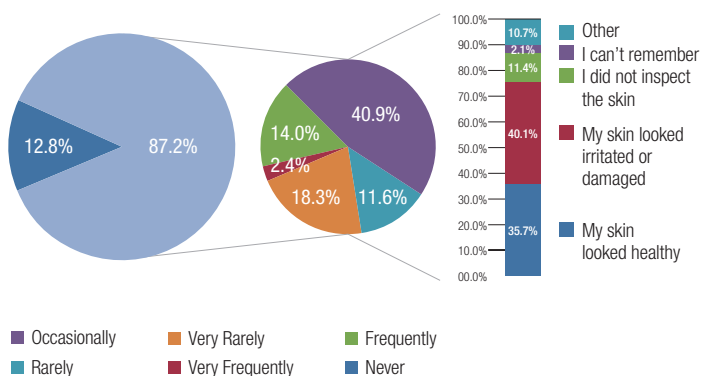
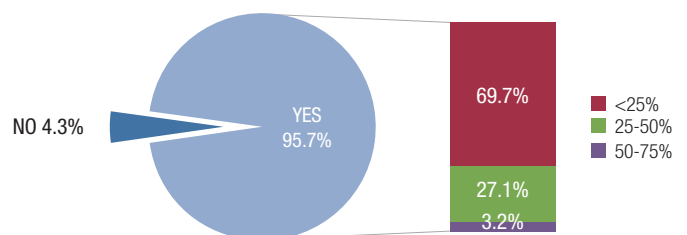


Figure 1: Individuals with stomas needs to scratch – How did the skin look?³

What proportion report pruritus*



*As a proportion of clinicians who said ‘Yes’

Figure 2: Patients reporting pruritus to their stoma care nurse.³

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Response	Better %	Worse %
Being in a dry environment	24.0	7.7
Anti-fungal powder	25.5	2.9
Heat	3.8	48.1
Humidity	3.9	52.4
Removing and replacing pouching system	78.7	2.2
Pressing on the pouching system	34.3	7.6
Scratching/rubbing the area	44.2	20.2

Figure 3: What made itching better or worse?³

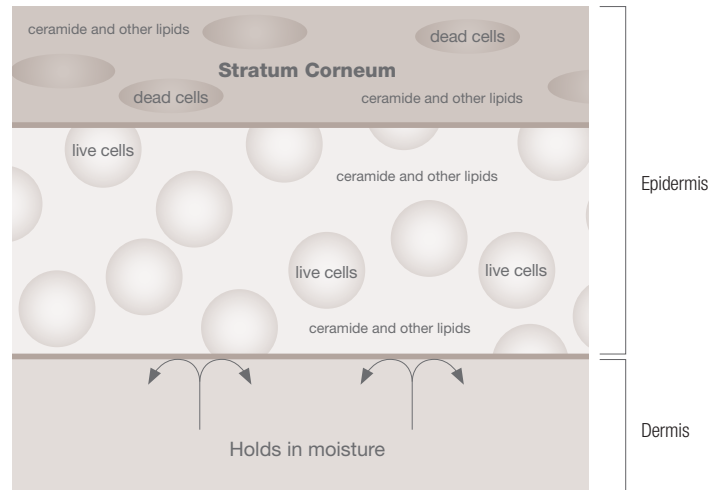


Figure 4: The Role of Ceramides in the Skin

Reported Impacts on Itching from a Ceramide-Infused Ostomy Skin Barrier

Ceramides are a form of lipid found naturally in the outer layers of human skin. The purpose of ceramides is to link cells of the outer skin together to form a waterproof, protective barrier to help prevent water loss from the skin and keep irritants out. Ceramide levels have also been correlated to TEWL (transepidermal water loss). (See Figure 4)

During a recent double-blinded, randomised controlled trial (RCT) of a ceramide-infused skin barrier, it was reported by patients during this trial that they were 'very satisfied' with itching prevention.⁵

The aim of a ceramide infused barrier is to help protect the skin's own moisture barrier, which in turn may provide a positive impact on peristomal itching.

Conclusions

Peristomal itching is a common problem experienced by ostomy patients and often reported to their stoma care nurse. However, in many cases, there is no visible causation for the itching and ostomy patients may resign themselves to tolerating the issue as an inevitable consequence of wearing an ostomy skin barrier.

New findings have demonstrated that the use of a ceramide-infused skin barrier may have positive results on patients experiencing pruritus.

References:

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