

## Bum wiping techniques and thong hygiene <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

I am curious to know whether there is any right and wrong ways to wipe one's ass! Is wiping sufficient or should it be cleaned with water thereafter? I've heard that people use water to clean, which is regarded as more hygienic in foreign countries.

How safe is wearing a thong in terms of hygiene after a bowel movement? I wonder because a thong literally sits right on the anus. Are there any products available commercially for genital hygiene?

Regards,  
Teenager

### Answer

Dear Teenager,

When it comes to good hygiene and preventing infection, there are definitely good and not-as-good ways to wipe. An interesting piece of anal trivia: the skin in this area is thin and easily irritated. Why? The anus is brilliant — it's sensitive enough to know the difference between gas, solid, and liquid and it knows how to contain everything until the right time. It has a powerful sphincter that may stay tightly closed but stretch quite widely when necessary. All this versatility requires lots of nerve endings, which means sensitive skin that must be treated with care.

Dry wiping after a bowel movement is not always the most hygienic, yet it's the most widely available method of cleaning up in the U.S., especially in public restrooms. There are products you may buy, though. Perfume free and dye free moist towelettes are one option, but the problem with moisture is that it ought to be removed from the rectum sooner rather than later to help avoid irritation. Whether wet or dry, here are some good wiping techniques to try:

- Wipe from front to back. Wiping from back to front may spread bacteria to the urethra and to the genitals, a risk most significant for women.
- Wipe thoroughly but gently. Too much friction may cause microtears, which are more prone to infection if fecal matter gets inside them.

- If you can clean with water, do so. If you're in a stall or restroom with a sink where you may moisten toilet paper, this may be a good way to get clean. Toilet paper, however, disintegrates upon contact with water, which makes it more flushable. So only moisten the toilet paper ever so slightly and pat dry after.
- When cleaning with water, don't use soap. If even the slightest soap residue is left, it may irritate skin and dry out the sensitive area. Only use soap in a shower or [bidet](#) [2] when you may thoroughly rinse.
- If you have a bowel movement in a public restroom and can't clean up with water, cleanse more thoroughly when you get home.

What to do about thongs? Your hunch is exactly right — they aren't the most hygienic. Here are some good tips to try:

- Don't wear thongs everyday. If you can, save them for occasional special days.
- Wear cotton thongs. Cotton underwear allows skin to breathe better compared to nylon and most other synthetic fabrics.
- Don't sleep in thongs. Let everything breathe over night.
- When you wear a thong, eating yogurt may help prevent yeast infections. Also, avoid thongs if you have a yeast infection or if you're on antibiotics.
- Thongs may spread germs from your anus to the vulva. If you're having any bowel troubles that may mean looser or messier stools, save the thong for when you feel better.

Many people think [douching](#) [3] is a good way to keep clean. Anal and vaginal douches may have other health consequences, primarily irritation and removal of good bacteria, so they're better avoided. In some cases, people use enemas to clean the anal area and lower colon. Check with a health care practitioner before choosing this option.

Cheers to hygiene — bottoms up!

Alice!

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