

HEMORRHOIDS

(Piles)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Hemorrhoids are dilated (varicose) veins of the rectum or anus. Hemorrhoids may be located at the beginning of the anal canal (internal hemorrhoids), or at the anal opening (external hemorrhoids). They may be present for years, but go undetected until bleeding occurs. They are very common in both men and women. About half of the population have hemorrhoids by age 50. Hemorrhoids are also common among pregnant women.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Rectal bleeding. Bright-red blood may appear as streaks on toilet paper adhering to fecal residue, or it may be a slow trickle for a short while following bowel movements. It almost always colors the toilet water.
- Pain, itching or mucus discharge after bowel movements.
- A lump that can be felt in the anus.
- A sensation that the rectum has not emptied completely after a bowel movement (large hemorrhoids only).
- Inflammation and swelling.

CAUSES

Repeated pressure in the anal or rectal veins.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Diet that lacks fiber.
- Prolonged sitting or prolonged standing.
- Obesity.
- Pregnancy (pressure of the fetus in the abdomen, as well as hormonal changes, cause the hemorrhoidal vessels to enlarge).
- Constipation.
- Loss of muscle tone in old age.
- Rectal surgery or episiotomy.
- Liver disease.
- Anal intercourse.
- Colon malignancy.
- Portal hypertension.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Don't try to hurry bowel movements, but do avoid straining and prolonged sitting on the toilet.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Include plenty of fiber in your diet.
- Drink 8 to 10 glasses of water a day.
- Exercise regularly.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Hemorrhoids usually clear up with proper care, but symptoms may come and go (may flare up after a bout of constipation). Stubborn cases may require surgery.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Iron-deficiency anemia if blood loss is significant.
- Severe pain caused by a blood clot in a hemorrhoid.
- Infection or ulceration of a hemorrhoid.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnosis may include an anoscopy (visual examination of the anus by means of a short tube called an anoscope, an optical instrument with lenses and a lighted tip), or proctoscopy (method of examining the rectum and lower part of the colon with a proctoscope, an optical instrument with a lighted tip). Sigmoidoscopy and colonoscopy are diagnostic procedures that also involve the use of lighted, flexible tubes inserted through the rectum.
- Treatment is aimed at easing the symptoms.
- For most women, hemorrhoids caused by pregnancy are a temporary problem.
- Never strain to push stool out.
- When sitting on the toilet, place feet on a low footstool to aid bowel movement.
- Clean the anal area gently with soft, moist paper after each bowel movement.
- To relieve pain, sit in 8 to 10 inches of warm water for 10 to 20 minutes several times a day.
- To reduce pain and swelling of a blood clot or protruding hemorrhoid, stay in bed for 1 day and apply ice packs to the anal area.
- Surgery may be required in stubborn cases. Procedures include ligation (tying off hemorrhoid with a rubber band to strangulate it); sclerotherapy (injection of chemical to induce scarring); cryosurgery (freezing the hemorrhoid with liquid nitrogen); coagulation (by infrared light or laser) or hemorrhoidectomy (surgical removal).

MEDICATION

- For minor pain, itching, or swelling, you may use nonprescription drugs that are formulated to relieve symptoms of hemorrhoids. If these symptoms occur during pregnancy, ask your obstetric provider which medications are appropriate to use.
- Use a stool softener, if a laxative is needed.

ACTIVITY

No restrictions. Bowel function improves with good physical conditioning.

DIET

- To prevent constipation, eat a well-balanced diet that contains many high-fiber foods such as fresh fruit, bran muffins, beans, vegetables and whole-grain cereals.
- Drink 8 to 10 glasses of fluid daily.
- A weight loss diet is recommended if you are overweight.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- A hard lump develops where a hemorrhoid has been.
- Hemorrhoids cause severe pain that is not relieved by treatment above or rectal bleeding is excessive.