



Hemorrhoids

PATIENT EDUCATION SERIES

What are hemorrhoids?

Hemorrhoids are enlarged or swollen veins in the lower rectum. They are common, occurring in both men and women. Although hemorrhoids do not usually cause serious health problems, they can be annoying and uncomfortable. Fortunately, treatments for hemorrhoids are available and can usually minimize the bothersome symptoms.

Symptoms

- ◆ Painless bleeding during bowel movements – you might notice small amounts of bright red blood on your toilet tissue or in the toilet bowl.
- ◆ Itching or irritation in your anal region
- ◆ Pain or discomfort
- ◆ Hemorrhoids protruding from your anus
- ◆ Swelling around your anus
- ◆ A sensitive or painful lump near your anus
- ◆ Leakage of feces

Hemorrhoid symptoms usually depend on the location. Internal hemorrhoids lie inside the rectum. You can't see or feel these hemorrhoids, and they usually don't cause discomfort. But straining or irritation when passing stool can injure a hemorrhoid's delicate surface and cause it to bleed. Occasionally, straining can push an internal hemorrhoid through the anal opening. This is known as a protruding or prolapsed hemorrhoid and can cause pain and irritation.

External hemorrhoids are under the skin around your anus. When irritated, external hemorrhoids can itch or bleed. Sometimes blood may pool in an external hemorrhoid and form a clot (thrombus), resulting in severe pain, swelling and inflammation.

Causes

- ◆ Straining during bowel movements
- ◆ Chronic diarrhea or constipation
- ◆ Obesity
- ◆ Pregnancy
- ◆ Anal intercourse

Diagnosis

To diagnose hemorrhoids, your clinician will examine your rectum and anus and may insert a gloved finger into the rectum. Further evaluation may include a procedure that allows your healthcare provider to look inside the anus (called anoscopy).

Initial treatment

One of the most important steps in treating hemorrhoids is avoiding constipation (hard or infrequent stools). Hard stool can lead to rectal bleeding and/or a tear in the anus, called an anal fissure. In addition, pushing and straining to move your bowels can worsen existing hemorrhoids and increase the risk of developing new hemorrhoids.

Fiber

Increasing fiber in your diet is one of the best ways to soften your stool. Fiber is found in fruits, vegetables, whole grain cereals and bran. See Fiber Food List. The recommended amount of dietary fiber is 20 – 35 grams/day.

Several Fiber supplements are also available (in pill or powder form), such as Metamucil (psyllium), Citrucel, or generic products. These products can be taken daily, per package directions, with plenty of fluids. Start with a small amount and increase slowly to avoid side effects. If large amounts of fiber products are introduced too quickly, some people experience increased gas.

Your provider may also advise other stool softeners to help hemorrhoids heal.

How to care for hemorrhoids

- ◆ A **Sitz Bath** is a plastic basin which fits over the toilet and is available at Health Services. During a Sitz Bath, you soak the rectal area in warm water for 10 – 15 minutes, two – three times a day. Sitz Bath works by improving blood flow and relaxing the muscles around the anus.
- ◆ Keep anal area clean – shower daily to cleanse the skin around your anus gently with warm water only.

- ◆ For rectal itching – clean the rectal area sufficiently so as not to leave it moist; at the same time avoid rubbing too aggressively with toilet paper.
- ◆ Lying down as often as possible may help hemorrhoids to heal.

Prevention

- ◆ Eat at regular hours and establish a regular time for bowel movements. Go to the toilet when you have the urge; never delay.
- ◆ Eat high fiber foods; doing so softens the stool and increases its bulk which will help you avoid the straining that can cause hemorrhoids.
- ◆ Drink plenty of fluids to help keep stools soft.
- ◆ Avoid prolonged sitting or standing. Sitting too long, especially on the toilet, can increase the pressure on the veins in the anus.
- ◆ Exercise daily.
- ◆ Consider fiber supplements in an ongoing basis; these products help keep stools soft and regular. Remember to drink plenty of fluids with the supplements.