

PATIENT HANDOUT: HEMORRHOIDS — Please feel free to copy this page

What are hemorrhoids?

Swollen veins in your anus are called hemorrhoids. Internal hemorrhoids occur inside the anus or lower rectum. Sometimes they might extend outside the anus and become prolapsed. External hemorrhoids occur in the skin around the anus. Although the exact cause is unknown, a contributing factor is believed to be increased pressure on the veins in the rectum. Constipation, pregnancy, and straining on the toilet may result in increased rectal pressure.

What are the symptoms of hemorrhoids?

Internal hemorrhoids are usually painless and may result in bleeding or a feeling of fullness in the rectum. Prolapsed hemorrhoids may feel like a painless lump when wiping after a bowel movement or cause a pinching sensation. Sometimes they might itch or feel tender, or they might crack and bleed, which will show as blood on the toilet paper after wiping or as blood in the toilet after a bowel movement. External hemorrhoids may feel itchy and painful. These can also crack and bleed with straining or rubbing. An external hemorrhoid can sometimes become an acutely painful bluish/purple lump at the edge of the anus.

When should you see your doctor?

If you are bleeding it is important to see the doctor to because bleeding may also be a sign of other disease. If you develop significant pain in the anal area this could be a sign of a type of external hemorrhoid which might be relieved by a small surgical procedure.

What can you do?

Hemorrhoids usually settle on their own and you should have relief from symptoms within a week or two. Here are some steps you can take to help soften your stools and prevent constipation:

- Increase the fibre in your diet by eating more fresh fruit, raw or cooked vegetables, and whole-grains.
- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids.
- Exercise regularly.
- Bulk-forming laxatives may help (e.g., bran or psyllium, such as Metamucil, Fibrepur, Novo-Mucilax, and Prodiem [plain]). Non-bulk-forming laxatives can lead to diarrhea, which may worsen your hemorrhoids.
- Visit the bathroom promptly when you feel the urge to have a bowel movement. Waiting too long may dry and harden your stool.

How to relieve the pain?

Although few studies provide evidence for the effectiveness of pain relief measures for hemorrhoids, some of the following may help reduce to discomfort and itching:

- Sitz baths (a warm shallow bath for soaking your anus) for 10 minutes a few times a day.
- Ice packs to relieve pain and swelling.
- Acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or aspirin.

What if my hemorrhoids do not resolve?

Talk with your family doctor about your options. Your doctor can refer you for an office-based procedure or surgery to treat your hemorrhoids.

Sources:

- 1) College of Family Physicians of Canada patient resource *Hemorrhoids – Reducing the pain and discomfort*. <http://www.cfpc.ca/ProjectAssets/Templates/Resource.aspx?id=4218>.
- 2) Mount Sinai Hospital Patient Care. *Hemorrhoids (Piles)*. <http://www.mountsinai.org/patient-care/health-library/diseases-and-conditions/hemorrhoids>.

