



Hemorrhoids

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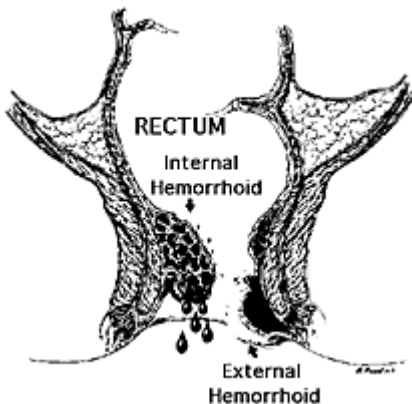
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The term hemorrhoid refers to a condition in which the veins around the anus or lower rectum are swollen and inflamed. Hemorrhoids may result from straining to move stool. Other contributing factors include pregnancy, aging, chronic constipation or diarrhea, and anal irritation. Hemorrhoids are either inside the anus (internal) or under the skin around the anus (external).

Hemorrhoids usually are not dangerous or life threatening. In most cases, hemorrhoidal symptoms will go away within a few days.

Although many people have hemorrhoids, not all experience symptoms. The most common symptom of internal hemorrhoids is bright red blood covering the stool, on toilet paper, or in the toilet bowl. However, an internal hemorrhoid may protrude through the anus outside the body, becoming irritated and painful. This is known as a prolapsed hemorrhoid. Usually bleeding from internal hemorrhoids is painless.

Symptoms of external hemorrhoids may include painful swelling or a hard lump around the anus that results when a blood clot forms. This condition is known as a thrombosed external hemorrhoid.



In addition, excessive straining, rubbing, or cleaning around the anus may cause irritation with bleeding and/or itching, which may produce a vicious cycle of symptoms. Draining mucus may also cause itching.

A thorough evaluation and proper diagnosis by the doctor is important any time bleeding from the rectum or blood in the stool occurs. Bleeding may also be a symptom of other digestive diseases, including colorectal cancer. The doctor will examine the anus and rectum to look for swollen blood vessels that indicate hemorrhoids and will also perform a digital rectal exam with a gloved, lubricated finger to feel for abnormalities.

To rule out other causes of gastrointestinal bleeding, the doctor may examine the rectum and lower colon (sigmoid) with sigmoidoscopy or the entire colon with colonoscopy. Sigmoidoscopy and colonoscopy are diagnostic procedures that also involve the use of lighted, flexible tubes inserted through the rectum.

Treatment

Treatment of hemorrhoids varies depending on where they are, what problems they are causing, and how serious they are. Often, time and the normal process of healing clear hemorrhoids with little or no specific treatment. When hemorrhoids require treatment, the following general measures are recommended:

Conservative Treatment

1. Keep the anal area clean, using a mild soap and gentle dabbing with a soft towel after a bowel movement. Avoid vigorous rubbing of the area. Hypoallergenic baby wipes are a good alternative to toilet paper.
2. Keep the anus and hemorrhoids as dry as possible, using talcum powder and a pad of soft tissue to absorb moisture.
3. Eat a diet high in fiber (bran) and roughage. Fiber and bran retain water in the stool, producing soft, bulky stools which are easier to pass and reduce the tendency to develop hemorrhoids. Bulking agents, such as Metamucil, , Konsyl, Citrucel, and Perdiem, are available in drug stores. These also come in less expensive generic versions.
4. Avoid straining when having a bowel movement.
5. When thrombosis, pain, and tenderness occur, a 10 to 20 minute hot tub bath two to four times daily brings heat to the area, provides relief from the pain, and promotes healing. This is called a hot Sitz bath.

Surgery is sometimes recommended in treating hemorrhoids. It usually is reserved for:

- Acute, painful clot (thrombosis) of hemorrhoids.
- Profusely or continuously bleeding hemorrhoids.
- Longstanding, irreversible, and large hemorrhoids .
- When conservative treatment is unsuccessful.

The physician evaluates each patient's case to determine the appropriate treatment. Usually a general or colorectal surgeon will do the hemorrhoid procedure.

To Prevent Hemorrhoids...

- Eat plenty of fiber, bran, or roughage, or use a bulking agent to maintain regular, soft bowel movements.
- Do not delay or try to prevent a bowel movement when the urge is present.
- Exercise, especially aerobic, may help produce more regular bowel movements.
- Drink plenty of liquids and eat regularly scheduled meals.
- Keep the area around the anus clean and dry.

Summary

Hemorrhoids are an especially common disorder and often clear up by themselves or with minimal treatment. Treatment typically is simple and effective, although surgery occasionally is necessary. Hemorrhoids can mask a more serious disorder and, therefore, must be evaluated and diagnosed properly by a physician. People with hemorrhoids who work closely with their physician are usually assured a good outcome and relief from this common disorder.

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