

PATIENT INFORMATION

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Hemorrhoids

What are hemorrhoids?

A hemorrhoid is a vein or mass of veins in the area of the anus or rectum that has become swollen, knotted, and painful. The hemorrhoid(s) might be inside or just outside of the rectum. Hemorrhoids may be caused by:

- A long history of straining to have a bowel movement.
- Pressure on the veins caused by the baby during pregnancy.
- Pressure on the veins caused by liver or heart problems.
- A growth or tumor in the rectum.

What are the symptoms of hemorrhoids?

Some people have small hemorrhoids for years that never or only occasionally cause them to have any problems. However, hemorrhoids can become swollen and painful. They often cause a burning or itching sensation. Sometimes they may bleed. You may notice small amounts of bright red blood on the toilet tissue or you can have larger amounts of bleeding.

Hemorrhoids that are caused by pregnancy often disappear a few weeks after delivery if you did not have them before you became pregnant.

How are hemorrhoids diagnosed?

The doctor may examine the anus to look for swollen blood vessels. He may also perform a rectal exam with a gloved, lubricated finger to feel for anything unusual.

How are hemorrhoids treated?

- It may help the pain and swelling of hemorrhoids to sit in a bath of warm water. The water should be deep enough to cover the buttocks and should not be too hot. This can be done two to three times a day.
- Ice packs covered with a soft cloth may be used to relieve swelling.
- Ask your doctor if he or she recommends using a hemorrhoidal cream to reduce swelling. Some creams also have a numbing agent that can help the sensations of pain and burning.
- When lying down, lie on your side or stomach.
- Use an inflatable, donut-shaped pillow when sitting for long periods of time.
- In some cases, your doctor may recommend hemorrhoid surgery. "Hemorrhoidectomy." is the name for a surgery done to remove hemorrhoids.

What else can I do?

If you have hemorrhoids, it is important to avoid constipation. Some ways to do this are:

- Include more fiber in your diet. Examples of foods that are high in fiber are whole grain breads and pasta, dried beans and peas, fresh fruits and vegetables, and high fiber breakfast cereal. Ask your doctor if he recommends a fiber supplement such as Metamucil® or Citrucel®.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Get regular exercise.
- Don't wait too long to use the bathroom when you feel the urge.
- Many medicines can cause constipation. If you think that your medicines may be causing this problem, talk with your doctor or pharmacist.

You will also want to avoid straining to have a bowel movement. Talk with your doctor about whether he recommends the occasional use of a stool softener for times when you are constipated. However, it is not recommended that you use stool softeners regularly because your bowels can get dependent on them.

Call your doctor if:

- The hemorrhoids become hardened and tender to the touch.
- If rectal bleeding is more than spotting following a bowel movement.
- You have any other questions or concerns.