

UNIVERSITY STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES • Fact Sheet

HEMORRHOIDS

WHAT ARE HEMORRHOIDS?

Hemorrhoids refer to a common condition in which veins around the anus or rectum become swollen and inflamed. Increased pressure inside the abdomen, often from repeatedly straining to have a bowel movement, causes the veins to become dilated.

Two sets of veins drain the lower rectum and anus:

- Internal hemorrhoids come from swollen internal veins (located inside the anus/rectum). Unless they are severe, internal hemorrhoids cannot be seen or felt.
- External hemorrhoids come from swollen external veins (located under the skin around the anus). This type of hemorrhoid can be seen or felt as a lump outside the anus.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Hemorrhoids are very common, affecting 3 out of 4 adults at some point in their lives. Anyone whose lifestyle or physical condition could produce increased pressure within the rectum or anus can develop hemorrhoids. Hemorrhoids may be related to:

- Prolonged sitting
- Frequent lifting of heavy objects
- Obesity
- Pregnancy
- Chronic constipation or diarrhea
- Anal intercourse

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Although hemorrhoids do not usually cause serious health problems, symptoms can be annoying or worrisome.

- ❖ **External hemorrhoids** are covered with pain-sensitive skin and often itch or hurt. They may appear as small lumps at the edge of the anus.
 - External hemorrhoids generally do not bleed. However, excessive straining, rubbing, or wiping can lead to irritation, itching, and intermittent bleeding.
 - If blood pools in the dilated vein and forms a blood clot, it is called a thrombosed external hemorrhoid, which can be extremely painful.
- ❖ **Internal hemorrhoids** usually do not itch or hurt, unless significant swelling causes the hemorrhoid to protrude through the anus. Painless rectal bleeding while having a bowel movement is common.
 - The amount of bleeding is usually small; but even a small amount of blood can make the toilet bowl appear bright red.
 - As a rule, chronic bleeding is usually due to internal hemorrhoids, while intermittent bleeding is due to external hemorrhoids.

If you notice bright red blood on the toilet paper, in the toilet bowl, or coating the stool, you may have a hemorrhoid. However, you should still see your medical provider to make sure the cause is not something more serious, like cancer.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

Your medical provider will need to examine your rectum and anus. A gloved finger may be inserted into the rectum to evaluate for masses and other abnormalities. Sometimes an instrument called an anoscope will be used to visualize the inside of the anus.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

The initial treatment approach for most patients consists of dietary/lifestyle changes and medications to decrease symptoms. Conservative treatment is successful for most patients and can be continued for as long as necessary. A thrombosed external hemorrhoid requires removal of the clot via an in-office procedure. Other surgical options are available for more complicated or persistent cases.

- ❖ **Sitz baths** help decrease swelling and irritation by increasing blood flow and relaxing the muscle around the anus.
 - Sit in a tub with 2-3 inches of plain, warm water for 10-15 minutes 2-3 times a day.
 - If you do not have access to a bathtub, portable bowls used for sitz baths can be purchased in most drugstores.
- ❖ **Increasing fiber intake** is key to treating hemorrhoids. Fiber softens stools and decreases painful bowel movements. It is also effective in decreasing bleeding from hemorrhoids.
 - Fiber supplements are an easy way to add fiber to your diet:
 - Examples include Metamucil, Citrucel, Fibercon, and Benefiber. These are available in many different forms, including powders, caplets, soft chews, and wafers.
 - Aim for 20-30 grams per day. Start low and go slow to avoid bloating and gassiness. (A tablespoon of bran, eaten with some applesauce to reduce dryness, is also a good bulking agent).
 - Drink 1.5 to 2 liters of water per day. Fiber intake must be accompanied by increased water intake to produce regular, soft stools.
 - Foods high in fiber include:
 - Veggies, like broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, raw celery, green peppers, legumes (beans and lentils), lettuce, spinach, tomatoes, zucchini.
 - Whole-grain breads/cereals, oatmeal, unbuttered popcorn.
 - Fresh fruits with skins, citrus, prunes, raisins, applesauce.
- ❖ **Medications**
 - Pain medications, like acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin), and naproxen (Aleve), can lessen discomfort. Take ibuprofen or naproxen with food to avoid an upset stomach. Follow the package instructions for safe dosing.
 - Hydrocortisone-containing creams or suppositories are available over-the-counter and by prescription to decrease itching, swelling, and pain. They may be used up to twice daily for no more than 7 days. Overuse of these products should be avoided as they can cause thinning and further injury to the skin.
 - Phenylephrine 0.25% (Preparation-H, Rectacaine) is a vasoactive agent frequently used for temporary relief of bleeding and pain with bowel movements. It is available over-the-counter as an ointment or suppository.
 - Numbing ointments may be prescribed for short-term treatment of pain and itching. Use should be limited to about a week or less. Mild burning may occur with initial application.
 - Witch Hazel (Tucks or Preparation H pads) can be used to dry secretions and decrease irritation (though it may sting slightly). It can also help shrink hemorrhoids.
 - Zinc oxide paste (Desitin and other products) helps to protect the skin, dry secretions, and decrease irritation. It also has antiseptic properties.
- ❖ **Lifestyle Measures**
 - Ice packs may help with swelling and pain.
 - Be gentle to your skin. Avoid excessive wiping/cleaning. Use a warm washcloth, unscented baby wipes with glycerin, or Tucks to clean the skin around the anus.
 - Avoid prolonged sitting, which can increase rectal pressure and/or contribute to constipation. If you sit all day or drive a lot, consider purchasing a ring- or donut-shaped pillow to sit on. Also avoid straining or lingering (i.e. reading) on the toilet.
 - Avoid nuts and corn. Because they are not fully digested, they can cause further irritation to hemorrhoids.
 - Avoid foods that are constipating, such as fatty foods, processed pre-packaged foods (donuts, muffins, etc.), alcohol, cheese, and starches (pasta, rice, potatoes).
 - Exercise regularly to avoid constipation.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES: www.fascrs.org, www.mayoclinic.org