

HEMORRHOIDS

Hemorrhoids are dilated veins of the rectum or anus. They can cause bleeding. They can be painful and cause problems when passing stool. External hemorrhoids are present at the anal opening and internal hemorrhoids are inside the anus near the opening of the anal canal. They are caused by increased pressure in the anal and rectal veins. You are more likely to develop hemorrhoids with a sedentary life style, routinely sitting or standing for prolonged periods of time, obesity, pregnancy, previous rectal surgery, anal intercourse, colon cancer, or frequent constipation and straining. A diet low in fiber may make the stool more difficult to pass thus increasing the incidence of hemorrhoids.

Symptoms may include:

- Rectal bleeding or blood in stools
- Pain during bowel movements
- Itching around the anus
- Inflammation and swelling around the anus
- A feeling that the rectum is not empty after a bowel movement

What your doctor can do:

- Diagnose hemorrhoids with a physical exam.
- Possibly order an *endoscopy* (exam of the rectum and lower colon with a fiber optic, flexible scope).
- Treat hemorrhoids that do not respond to home treatment with any of several procedures. These include *ligation* (tying off of the hemorrhoid), *hemorrhoidectomy* (removal requiring surgery), and *cryosurgery* (freezing the hemorrhoid with liquid nitrogen).

What you can do:

- Eat a high fiber diet and increase your intake of fluid, especially water, to decrease constipation
- Lose weight if you are overweight
- Avoid other risk factors listed above when possible
- Take sitz baths several times a day for 10-15 minutes at a time
- Apply ice packs to the anal area
- Use corticosteroid creams to reduce pain and swelling

What you can expect:

- You may have hemorrhoids for many years with no symptoms or very infrequent symptoms that are easily treated at home.
- Medical treatment is sometimes necessary.
- Possible complications of hemorrhoids include anemia from prolonged loss of blood; pain and discomfort, especially with bowel movements; and complications of surgery.

Contact your doctor if your hemorrhoids do not improve with treatment.