

Hemorrhoids

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

What are hemorrhoids?

Hemorrhoids are swollen veins in the rectum. They can cause itching, bleeding, and pain. Hemorrhoids are very common. In some cases, you can see or feel hemorrhoids around the outside of the rectum. In other cases, you cannot see them because they are hidden inside the rectum.

Hemorrhoids do not always cause symptoms. But when they do, they can include:

- Itching of the skin around the anus
- Bleeding – Bleeding is usually painless and occurs during bowel movement. You might see bright red blood after using the toilet on your toilet tissue or in the toilet bowl.
- Pain – If a blood clot forms inside a hemorrhoid, this can cause pain.

You may also experience:

- swelling around your anus
- A sensitive or painful lump near your anus
- Leakage of feces

Hemorrhoid symptoms usually depend on the location. Internal hemorrhoids lie inside the rectum. You can't see or feel these hemorrhoids, and they usually don't cause discomfort. But straining or irritation when passing stool can injure a hemorrhoid's delicate surface and cause it to bleed. Occasionally, straining can push an internal hemorrhoid through the anal opening. This is known as a protruding or prolapsed hemorrhoid and can cause pain and irritation. External hemorrhoids are under the skin around your anus. When irritated, external hemorrhoids can itch or bleed. Sometimes blood may pool in an external hemorrhoid and form a clot (thrombus), resulting in severe pain, swelling and inflammation.

Causes of Hemorrhoids Include:

- Straining during bowel movements
- Chronic diarrhea or constipation
- Obesity
- Pregnancy
- Anal intercourse

Diagnosis

To diagnose hemorrhoids, your clinician will examine your rectum and anus and may insert a gloved finger into the rectum. Further evaluation may include a procedure that allows your healthcare provider to look inside the anus (called anoscopy), or evaluation by a proctologist.

Management of Hemorrhoids

Initiate Lifestyle Changes:

One of the most important steps in treating hemorrhoids is avoiding constipation (hard or infrequent stools). Hard stool can lead to rectal bleeding and/or a tear in the anus, called an anal fissure. In addition, pushing and straining to move your bowels can worsen existing hemorrhoids and increase the risk of developing new hemorrhoids.

Treatment:

Your Provider may recommend treatment of irritation or pruritus from internal or external hemorrhoids with analgesic creams, hydrocortisone suppositories, and warm sitz baths.

How to care for hemorrhoids

- A Sitz Bath is a plastic basin which fits over the toilet and is available at Health Services. During a Sitz Bath, you soak the rectal area

in warm water for 10 – 15 minutes, two to three times a day. Sitz Bath works by improving blood flow and relaxing the muscles around the anus.

- Keep anal area clean – shower daily to cleanse the skin around your anus gently with warm water only.
- For rectal itching – clean the rectal area sufficiently so as not to leave it moist; at the same time avoid rubbing too aggressively with toilet paper.
- Lying down as often as possible may help hemorrhoids to heal.
- Using a non-scented lotion to cleanse after bowel movements.

How can I keep from getting hemorrhoids?

- Eat at regular hours and establish a regular time for bowel movements. Go to the toilet when you have the urge; never delay.
- Eat lots of fruits, vegetables, and other foods with fiber. Drink plenty of fluids to help keep stools soft.
- Avoid prolonged sitting or standing. Sitting too long, especially on the toilet, can increase the pressure on the veins in the anus.
- Exercise daily.
- If you do not get enough fiber from your diet, you can take fiber supplements. These come in the form of powders, wafers, or pills. They help keep stool soft and regular. Remember to drink plenty of fluids with these supplements.
- Take medicines called "stool softeners" such as docusate sodium. They increase the number of bowel movements you have. They are safe to take and they can prevent problems later.

What is fiber?

Fiber helps to increase bowel movements. Increasing fiber in your diet is one of the best ways to soften your stool. Fiber is found in fruits,

vegetables, whole grain cereals and bran. See Fiber Food List. The recommended amount of dietary fiber is 20 – 35 grams/day. Several Fiber supplements are also available (in pill or powder form), such as Metamucil (psyllium), Citrucel, or generic products. These products can be taken daily, per package directions, with plenty of fluids. Start with a small amount and increase slowly to avoid side effects.

Caution:

If large amounts of fiber products are introduced too quickly, some people experience increased gas. Your provider may also advise other stool softeners to help hemorrhoids heal.

If your symptoms persist and become severe, your PCP may recommend referral to a Surgeon or GI Specialist.