

Hemorrhoid Management

“What are Hemorrhoids?” Hemorrhoids are swollen blood vessels in and around the anus and lower rectum. They can occur inside the rectum, or outside the anus where you can see them. Sometimes they can develop on the inside, but extend through the anus to the outside. Both men and women get hemorrhoids, and they become more common as we get older. Pregnancy is a very common time for women to develop hemorrhoids.

“How did I get Hemorrhoids?” Hemorrhoids are caused by pressure on the blood vessels that causes them to swell. Other factors that can cause hemorrhoids are: Chronic constipation, straining during bowel movements, hormonal changes in pregnancy (causes blood vessels to enlarge), a sedentary lifestyle, and just growing older.

“How can I tell if I have Hemorrhoids?” Although hemorrhoids can exist without any symptoms, the typical symptoms of hemorrhoids are: Painful swelling or a hard lump around the anus, anal itching, noticing blood on the toilet paper, in the stool or in the toilet after a bowel movement. If you suspect that you may have hemorrhoids, you should see your doctor—especially if there is any bleeding noted. Rectal bleeding can be a sign of other, possibly more serious problems, and should never be ignored.

“What can I do to feel better?” Warm sitz baths (sitting in a tub of warm water for 10 minutes, several times a day) will help. Other than gentle cleansing, don't put soap or other products on your hemorrhoids, unless told to do so by your health care provider. Ice packs can help if there is a lot of swelling. There are a variety of creams or suppositories available without a prescription that you can try. You should see your provider if these measures aren't helping after a few days.

“How can I prevent Hemorrhoids?” You MUST avoid straining during bowel movements, as this increases pressure, swelling and bleeding. To help prevent the need to strain, you should: Use the toilet immediately (don't delay) when you feel the urge to empty your bowels. Drink at least 6-8 glasses of water each day (alcohol doesn't count). Increase your dietary fiber (fresh fruits & veggies, and whole grain foods). Consider taking a fiber supplement—Metamucil, Citrucel, and many others are available. Remember though, extra fiber won't help without LOTS of water to drink! Get regular exercise—walking counts—every day. Don't sit on the toilet for a long time—if it isn't happening now, try again later.

“Can't I just have them removed?” Sometimes your provider will recommend this, but not usually. It's important to try the above-mentioned methods first, as they will probably work and save you the need for surgery. Ask your provider for more information.