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# Hemorrhoids

## Hemorrhoids Overview

Hemorrhoids are enlarged or swollen blood vessels in the lower rectum. The most common symptoms of hemorrhoids are rectal bleeding, itching, and pain. You may be able to see or feel hemorrhoids around the outside of the anus, or they may be hidden from view, inside the rectum.

## Hemorrhoid Symptoms

Hemorrhoids are very common, though they may be seen more frequently in people who sit for long periods of time and/or strain to have a bowel movement. Hemorrhoids may also be seen in patients with diarrhea, during and after pregnancy, and patients with liver failure.

Symptoms of hemorrhoids can include the following:

1. Painless rectal bleeding
2. Anal itching or pain
3. Tissue bulging around the anus
4. Leakage of feces or difficulty cleaning after a bowel movement

## Hemorrhoid Diagnosis

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

## **Initial Hemorrhoid Treatment**

One of the most important steps in treating hemorrhoids is avoiding constipation (hard or infrequent stools). Hard stools 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.

**Fiber Supplements-** Increasing fiber in your diet is one of the best ways to soften your stools. Many fruits and vegetables can be particularly helpful in preventing and treating constipation. This is especially true of citrus fruits, prunes, and prune juice. Some breakfast cereals are also an excellent source of dietary fiber. The recommended amount of dietary fiber is 20 to 38 grams per day. Fiber supplements are also available.

**Warm Sitz Baths-** During a sitz bath, you soak the rectal area in warm water for 10-15 minutes two to three times daily. Do not add soap, bubble bath, or additives to the water. Sitz baths work by improving blood flow and relaxing the muscle around the anus, called the internal anal sphincter.

**Topical Treatments-** Various creams are available to treat hemorrhoids, and many are available without a prescription. Pain-relieving creams and hydrocortisone rectal suppositories may help relieve pain, inflammation, and itching, at least temporarily.

**Hemorrhoid Surgery-** If you continue to have hemorrhoids despite conservative or minimally invasive therapies, you may require surgical removal of hemorrhoids (hemorrhoidectomy). Surgery is the treatment choice for patients with large internal hemorrhoids. Hemorrhoidectomy involves surgically removing excess hemorrhoidal tissue. It is successful in 95 percent of patients.