Haemorrhoids

Summary

- Haemorrhoids, or piles, are varicose veins of the rectum or anus.
- Straining on the toilet because of constipation usually causes them.
- Both prevention and treatment rely on changing your diet to include plenty of fruits, vegetables, cereals and water.

Haemorrhoids, or piles, are varicose veins of the rectum or anus. They are common in middle and later life, often caused by years of chronic constipation.

Types of haemorrhoids

The three different types of haemorrhoids include:

- internal haemorrhoids – found inside the rectum. They are painless but tend to bleed
- prolapsed haemorrhoids – a more severe and painful form of internal haemorrhoids. These veins push through the anus and hang out of the body, particularly after going to the toilet. Sometimes, the anal sphincter (ring of muscle) can strangulate veins that hang out permanently
- external haemorrhoids – are like small haemorrhages (bleeds) under the skin around the anus. They feel like hard lumps.

Symptoms of haemorrhoids

Bleeding is the most common symptom of haemorrhoids. Most people with internal haemorrhoids notice a smear of bright red blood on the toilet paper, or perhaps streaks of blood in the faeces. It is important to see a doctor, because bleeding from the bowel can be caused by other conditions too (some of them serious), including bowel cancer.

Causes of haemorrhoids

Haemorrhoids develop slowly over time. Small blood vessels and veins in and around the rectum and anus carry deoxygenated blood back to the heart. If this return blood flow is hindered, then these tiny blood vessels and veins can distend with blood and eventually grow fat and knobbly.

The main causes of haemorrhoids include:

- straining on the toilet because of constipation
- pregnancy, because of the extra weight and pressure on the bowels
- hereditary factors
- heavy manual labour.

Sitting on hard surfaces for long stretches of time can also contribute to the development of haemorrhoids.

Prevention and treatment for haemorrhoids

Both treating and preventing haemorrhoids rely on eliminating constipation. A diet high in vegetables, fruits, cereals and water will help produce soft bowel motions that are passed easily and regularly.

Apart from improvements to your daily diet, there are a number of other treatments for haemorrhoids, including:

- astringent ointments or suppositories to shrivel the haemorrhoids
- band ligation of haemorrhoids- small bands are placed via a proctoscope to reduce the haemorrhoids
- surgery as a last resort.

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Where to get help

- Your doctor

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Gut Foundation Research Institute

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au