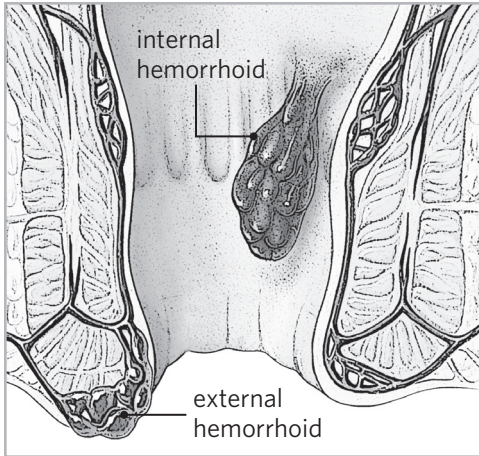


Hemorrhoids



Hemorrhoids are swollen veins in your lower rectum or anus.

Your rectum is the last part of your large intestine or colon. You get hemorrhoids when there's too much pressure put on these veins, which causes them to swell and stretch.

Hemorrhoids are very common. By age 50, about half of adults have had hemorrhoids. Treatments can help ease pain, and there are steps you can take to help prevent them.

Symptoms

Hemorrhoids can be external—on the outside of your anus—or internal—on the inside of your rectum. Symptoms are more common if you have an external hemorrhoid. If you have an internal hemorrhoid, it may bleed, but you won't have pain or discomfort. Symptoms include:

- **bleeding from your rectum** during bowel movements (red blood on toilet paper or in the toilet bowl)
- **pain around your anus**, especially during or after bowel movements
- **itching or burning** around your anus
- **leaking or draining** from your anus
- **swelling** around your anus
- **a sensitive or painful lump** near your anus

Hemorrhoids can also be prolapsed, which means an internal hemorrhoid stretches outside of your anus.

Even if you'd had hemorrhoids before, it's important to talk to your doctor when you have any bleeding from your rectum. This can be a sign of other serious health conditions.

Causes

One of the main causes of hemorrhoids is **straining during bowel movements**. Anything that increases pressure on the veins in your rectum or anus can increase your risk of hemorrhoids, including:

- **chronic (ongoing) constipation or diarrhea**
- **sitting on the toilet for long periods of time**
- **a low-fiber diet**—which leads to constipation
- **aging**—the tissues that support the veins in your rectum and anus get weaker over time
- **pregnancy**—because of certain hormones that cause your veins to relax and swell easily and extra pressure from your uterus
- **being overweight**—this puts extra pressure on your rectum
- **activities that cause you to strain**—like heavy lifting

Treatment

If you think you're having symptoms of hemorrhoids, it's best to see your doctor to make sure it isn't something more serious. To help ease the pain of hemorrhoids, your doctor may suggest:

Over-the-counter medicines—Pain relievers like ibuprofen and acetaminophen can help ease symptoms.



To learn more, visit:

- **American Academy of Family Physicians**
www.familydoctor.org
- **National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse**
www.digestive.niddk.nih.gov

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Topical treatments—Over-the-counter hemorrhoid creams, suppositories and wipes can help ease pain and itching. But don't use these creams for more than a week without talking to your doctor first. They can cause side effects like rash, swelling and thinning skin.

If your hemorrhoid is causing complications like severe pain or a blood clot forms inside a hemorrhoid, your doctor may recommend a procedure to shrink or remove it.

To help ease symptoms of hemorrhoids, you can also try these tips:

Take a sitz bath. A sitz bath is a basin that fits under your toilet seat. You can use it to soak the inflamed area in warm water for 10 to 15 minutes, several times a day.

Use moist cleansing wipes. Avoid rough toilet paper, which can worsen your pain.

Take warm baths. A warm bath each day can soothe your anus and keep the area clean.

Prevention

Talk to your doctor about ways to prevent future hemorrhoids. Your doctor may suggest you:

Be more active. Exercise can help prevent the constipation that leads to straining during bowel movements.

Increase the fiber in your diet. You need between 21 to 38 grams of fiber a day (depending on your age and sex). Make sure your daily diet includes fruits, vegetables and whole grains. You may also want to ask your doctor about taking fiber supplements.

Drink a lot of water. Water can help you digest your foods and keep you well hydrated. Aim for at least eight glasses of water a day.

Practice healthy bathroom habits. Try not to strain when you're having a bowel movement, and don't sit on the toilet for too long.

Go when you feel the urge. Don't hold your bowel movements for too long. Putting off going to the bathroom can cause constipation, which can lead to hemorrhoids.

Remember:

- If you think you have hemorrhoids, talk to your doctor, especially if you notice blood during your bowel movements.
- Don't use an over-the-counter hemorrhoid medicine for longer than one week, unless your doctor tells you to.
- Try to avoid getting hemorrhoids by preventing constipation, which causes you to strain when you have bowel movements.