



Haemorrhoids are varicose veins

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. 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** – these are like small haemorrhages (bleeds) under the skin around the anus. They feel like hard lumps.

Bleeding from the bowel needs medical attention

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.

Blood flow is hindered

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 knobby. 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.

Attention to diet is the answer

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

Other treatments

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
- Injections
- Surgery as a last resort.

Where to get help

- Your doctor.

Things to remember

- 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 the diet to include plenty of fruits, vegetables, cereals and water.

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