

do you suffer from

# hemorrhoids?

Hemorrhoids, also called piles, are swollen and inflamed veins in your anus and lower rectum. This very common condition affects about half of all Americans by the age of 50.

## Symptoms

Symptoms of hemorrhoids usually depend on their location. Internal hemorrhoids lie inside the rectum. You can't see or feel these hemorrhoids, and they usually don't cause discomfort. External hemorrhoids are under the skin around your anus.

Symptoms of hemorrhoids at either location may include:

- Painless bleeding during bowel movements — you might notice small amounts of bright red blood on your toilet tissue or in the toilet bowl
- Itching or irritation in your anal region
- Pain or discomfort
- Hemorrhoids protruding from your anus
- Swelling around your anus
- A sensitive or painful lump near your anus
- Leakage of feces

## When to See a Doctor

You should seek medical advice if your hemorrhoids cause pain, bleed frequently or excessively, or don't improve with home remedies.

If your hemorrhoid symptoms began along with a marked change in bowel habits or if you're passing black, tarry or maroon stools, blood clots or blood mixed in with the stool, consult your doctor without delay. These types of stools can signal more extensive bleeding elsewhere in your digestive tract.

Seek emergency care if you experience large amounts of rectal bleeding, lightheadedness, dizziness or faintness.

## A Note About Rectal Bleeding

Even though bleeding during bowel movements is the most common sign of hemorrhoids, rectal bleeding can occur with other digestive diseases, including colorectal cancer and anal cancer. Don't assume that bleeding is coming from hemorrhoids without consulting a doctor. Your doctor can do a physical examination and perform other tests to diagnose hemorrhoids and rule out more serious conditions or diseases.



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## Causes

Hemorrhoids can develop from an increase in pressure in the lower rectum. Factors that might cause increased pressure include:

- Straining during bowel movements
- Sitting for long periods of time on the toilet
- Chronic diarrhea or constipation
- Obesity
- Pregnancy and child birth
- Anal intercourse

It's also possible to inherit a tendency to develop hemorrhoids. Hemorrhoids are more likely as you get older because the tissues that support the veins in your rectum and anus can weaken and stretch with aging.

## Lifestyle and Home Remedies

You can temporarily relieve most hemorrhoidal flare-ups with the following self-care measures:

- Apply an over-the-counter hemorrhoid cream or suppository containing hydrocortisone, or use pads containing witch hazel or a topical numbing agent.
- Bathe daily with warm water and without soap as it may aggravate the problem. Dry the area with a hair dryer to minimize moisture, which can cause irritation.
- Soak in a warm bath or use a sitz bath several times a day.
- Apply ice packs or cold compresses to relieve swelling.
- Use moist towelettes that don't contain perfume or alcohol to cleanse after a bowel movement.
- Oral medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), aspirin or ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) may offer temporary help in relieving your pain and discomfort.

These self-care measures may relieve the symptoms, but they won't make the hemorrhoid disappear. See your doctor if you don't get relief in a few days, or sooner if you have severe pain or bleeding.



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## Prevention

The best way to prevent hemorrhoids is to keep your stools soft so they pass easily. To do this, follow these suggestions:

- Eat high-fiber foods and more fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Add fiber to your diet slowly to avoid problems with gas.
- Drink 6-8 glasses of water and other liquids (not alcohol) daily.
- Consider fiber supplements. Most people don't get enough of the recommended amount of fiber — 20 to 35 grams a day — in their diet. Studies have shown that over-the-counter fiber supplements, such as Metamucil and Citrucel, improve overall symptoms and bleeding from hemorrhoids. These products help keep stools soft and regular. If you use fiber supplements, be sure to drink at least eight glasses of water or other fluids every day. Otherwise, the supplements can cause constipation or make constipation worse.
- Don't strain. Straining and holding your breath when trying to pass a stool creates greater pressure in the veins in the lower rectum.
- Go as soon as you feel the urge or your stool could become dry and be harder to pass.
- Exercise can help reduce pressure on your veins, which can occur with long periods of standing or sitting. Staying active can also help you lose excess weight that may be contributing to your hemorrhoids.

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