

### **What are hemorrhoids?**

Hemorrhoids are enlarged, bulging blood vessels, similar to varicose veins that occur in the anal and lower rectal region. They are classified according to their location. External hemorrhoids develop near the anus, while internal hemorrhoids develop within the anus, beneath the lining.

External hemorrhoids can be painful as they are covered by sensitive skin. External hemorrhoids may develop a blood clot, which can cause a hard, painful lump. These are known as thrombosed external hemorrhoids, and may bleed if a rupture occurs.

Internal hemorrhoids typically do not cause pain, but they may bleed or protrude during bowel movements. If an internal hemorrhoid protrudes from the anal opening and cannot be pushed back inside, a condition known as a prolapsed hemorrhoid, it may cause severe pain.

### **What causes hemorrhoids?**

Although the exact cause of hemorrhoids is unknown, pressure in the abdomen may cause the veins to swell and become irritated. This pressure may be caused by pregnancy, standing for long periods, straining during bowel movements, coughing, or vomiting.

Other contributing factors may include:

- Aging
- Chronic constipation or diarrhea
- Heredity
- Faulty bowel function due to overuse of laxatives or enemas
- Spending long periods of time on the toilet (for example, sitting on the toilet while reading)
- Poor nutrition
- Obesity

Over time, the pressure causes the tissues supporting the vessels to stretch. If the stretching and pressure continue, the weakened vessels protrude.

### **Hemorrhoid symptoms**

Symptoms of hemorrhoids may include:

- Pain, bleeding, or itching in the anal area
- Bleeding during bowel movements
- A protrusion during bowel movements
- Sensitive lumps

## **Hemorrhoid treatment**

Hemorrhoids can often be effectively treated at home. Mild symptoms may be relieved by increasing the amount of fiber and fluids in the diet. Eliminate excessive straining in order to reduce pressure on hemorrhoids and prevent them from protruding. Sitting in plain warm water for about 10 minutes may also provide some relief.

Adopting these measures can often reduce hemorrhoid pain and swelling within two to seven days. Firm lumps may take four to six weeks to recede. If home treatment is not effective, or if you have persistent pain from a thrombosed hemorrhoid, your doctor may recommend a procedure to remove the hemorrhoid that contains the blood clot. This procedure can be performed on an outpatient basis under local anesthesia.

Severe hemorrhoids may require one of the following procedures, some of which can be performed on an outpatient basis.

- Ligation (rubber band treatment) is typically effective on internal hemorrhoids that produce during bowel movements. Your doctor will place a small rubber band over the hemorrhoid in order to cut off its blood supply. After a few days, the hemorrhoid falls off, and the wound typically heals in one to two weeks. Ligation may cause mild discomfort and bleeding, and may need to be repeated to achieve optimal results. This procedure is typically done in the doctor's office, as no anesthesia is required.
- Injection and coagulation are often effective on bleeding internal hemorrhoids that do not protrude. These methods, which cause the hemorrhoid to shrivel up, are relatively painless.
- Hemorrhoid stapling is a procedure that staples and remove the tissue of internal hemorrhoids. Stapling of external hemorrhoids may lead to shrinkage but does not remove the hemorrhoid. Stapling is generally more painful than hemorrhoid ligation but not as painful as a hemorrhoidectomy.
- The most complete method of removal for both internal and external hemorrhoids is a surgery known as hemorrhoidectomy. This procedure may be necessary in cases of persistent bleeding, repeated clots, a protruding hemorrhoid that cannot be reduced, or internal hemorrhoids that do not respond to ligation. A hemorrhoidectomy remove the excessive tissue involved in the bleeding and protrusion. This procedure may require a hospital stay and a brief recovery period.

## **Do hemorrhoids lead to cancer?**

There is no relationship between hemorrhoids and cancer. However, the symptoms associated with hemorrhoids, especially bleeding, are similar to many other diseases of the digestive system, including colorectal cancer. If you have any symptoms that you think may be indicative of hemorrhoids, it is important to have your symptoms evaluated by a doctor who specializes in conditions of the colon and rectum. Everyone over 50 years of age should undergo screening for colorectal cancer. Do not attempt any home hemorrhoid treatments without first being properly diagnosed by a doctor.