

Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are a common problem. In fact, about half of people over age 50 have them at some time. They're usually not serious or very painful, but they can be annoying. Fortunately, there are effective treatments. And if you're careful to eat well and exercise, you can often prevent them.

What are hemorrhoids?

Hemorrhoids are swollen veins in the rectum and anus. The **rectum** is the last part of digestive system, where stool (poop) is stored until you pass it. The **anus** is a ring of muscles (sphincter) that opens when you pass stool.

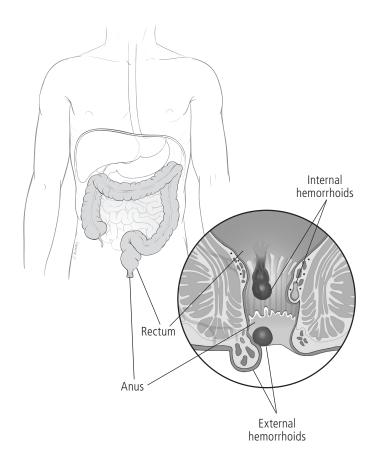
The anus and rectum are circled by two sets of blood vessels, one just inside at the base of the rectum, and one just outside the anus.

Swollen veins inside the rectum are called **internal hemorrhoids**. Sometimes internal hemorrhoids can extend outside the anus. Swollen veins outside the anus are called **external hemorrhoids**. External hemorrhoids are painful more often than internal hemorrhoids.

What are the symptoms?

You may experience these symptoms if you have hemorrhoids:

- Pressure, itching, or pain in and around the anus
- Blood in your underwear, on your toilet paper, or in the toilet water
- Blood on your stool
- A grape-like lump on your anus
- A hard, painful lump on your anus (usually caused by a blood clot)



When should I call a doctor?

First, try the self-care methods on the back of this page. If your symptoms don't improve, you need to be checked. Your doctor may be able to treat them. Your doctor can also make sure they're not caused by some other problem.

Call your doctor if:

- You continue bleeding or you're in pain
- Your stool is black and tarry or maroon (this could be a sign of bleeding elsewhere in your digestive tract)

Call your doctor right away if you experience:

- A hard lump (blood clot)
- Excessive bleeding
- · Lightheadedness, dizziness, or faintness

What causes hemorrhoids?

Hemorrhoids are caused by too much pressure on the veins in the rectum and anus. The pressure makes the veins become swollen and irritated. Conditions that create this extra pressure include:

- Frequent constipation and straining during a bowel movement
- Diarrhea
- Standing or sitting for a long time, especially sitting on the toilet
- Pregnancy and childbirth
- Obesity
- Cirrhosis of the liver

How can I prevent them?

Most people can prevent or relieve constipation and hemorrhoids using these measures:

- Eat more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

 These foods soften your stool and allow you to pass it with less strain.
- **Use a mild fiber supplement.** A supplement can help keep your stool soft and regular. But if you use a supplement, be sure to drink plenty of water, or it can make constipation worse.
- **Drink plenty of water.** Water makes your stool softer and easier to pass.
- Exercise every day. Exercise helps control your weight, reduces constipation, and increases muscle tone.
- Don't stand or sit for long periods of time. Or if you must, take a break every hour or so.
- **Lose extra weight.** Extra weight puts more pressure on the veins of your rectum.
- **Don't strain during a bowel movement.** Pushing hard puts more pressure on the veins of your rectum.
- Go to the bathroom as soon as you feel the urge.

 If you wait and the urge goes away, your stool could become dry and hard to pass.

How does my doctor test for them?

Your doctor may use one of these methods:

- **Physical exam.** The doctor can look at the area, and feel for them using a gloved finger.
- A rectal scope. Your doctor can examine your rectum using a lighted scope.
- **Colonoscopy.** Your doctor may want to look inside your colon to make sure the bleeding isn't caused by something else. A long, flexible tube with a tiny video camera at the end can be inserted through your rectum.

How can my doctor treat them?

If your hemorrhoids are large and continue to bleed, your doctor may be able to remove them using one of these medical procedures:

- Rubber band ligation. The doctor places a tiny rubber band around the hemorrhoid. This cuts off the circulation and the hemorrhoid shrivels up and falls off.
- **Injection (sclerotherapy).** The doctor injects a chemical that shrinks the blood vessels.
- **Infrared light.** A short burst of infrared light can cut off the circulation to small internal hemorrhoids.
- **Surgery.** Large external hemorrhoids can often be surgically removed.

Can I treat my own hemorrhoids?

Yes. Once you develop hemorrhoids, they usually don't go away completely unless you undergo one of the medical procedures above. But these methods may reduce the pain and itching:

- **Use a hemorrhoid cream.** Use an over-the-counter cream or suppository containing hydrocortisone, or pads containing witch hazel.
- **Take sitz baths.** Sit in a shallow bath of warm water several times a day.
- Take acetaminophen to relieve pain.
- Don't scratch them, and wipe gently.
- Relieve your constipation.