

Hemorrhoids

What are hemorrhoids?

Hemorrhoids [HEM-uh-roids] 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.

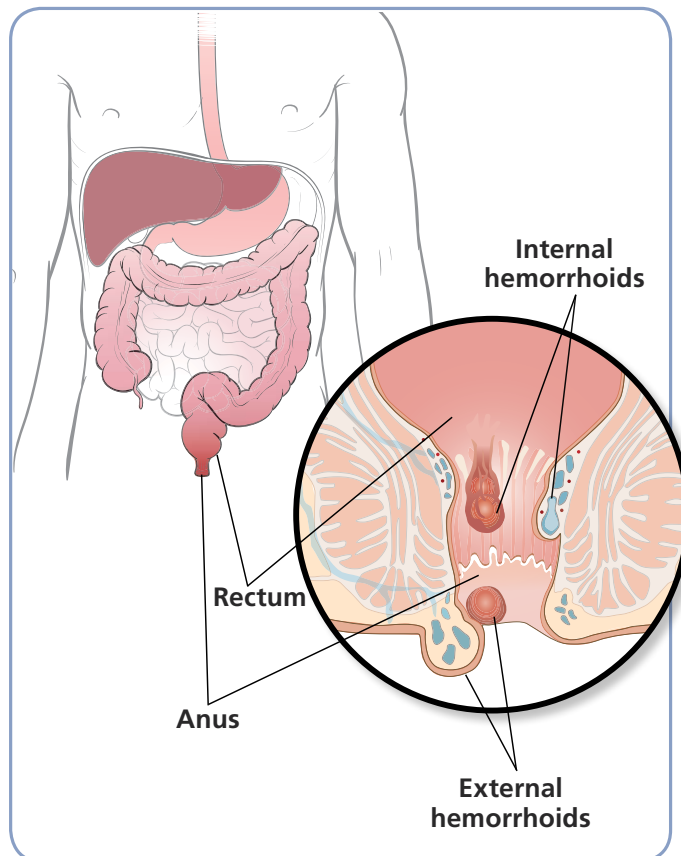
The anus and rectum are circled by two sets of blood vessels, one just inside at the base of the rectum, and one just outside the anus.

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 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



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)

How are hemorrhoids treated?

If your hemorrhoids are small, these common treatments may help to 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.**

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.** A tiny rubber band is placed around the hemorrhoid to cut off the blood supply. The hemorrhoid shrivels up and falls off.
- **Injection (sclerotherapy).** A chemical is injected to shrink the blood vessel.
- **Infrared light.** A short burst of infrared light is used to cut off the blood supply to small internal hemorrhoids.
- **Surgery.** This is usually done on large external hemorrhoids.

How can I prevent them?

- **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. 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.
- **Don't stand or sit for long periods of time.** Or if you must, take a break every hour or so.
- **Exercise every day.** Exercise helps control your weight, reduces constipation, and increases muscle tone.
- **Lose extra weight.** Extra weight puts more pressure on the veins of your rectum.
- **Don't push during a bowel movement.** Pushing 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.



When should I call my doctor?

First, try the self-care methods on 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.

Make an appointment with your doctor if you have:

- Continued bleeding or pain
- Black and tarry or maroon stool (a sign of possible 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

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