



Haemorrhoids

(also known as 'piles')



Haemorrhoids are swollen veins (like varicose veins) inside the anus (internal) or around and outside the anus (external). They are often caused by pressure in the bowel or hard stools (faeces). Haemorrhoids can be treated with medicines, diet and anal care.

Haemorrhoids are very common. They can develop in anyone at any age, but are rare in young people under 20 years of age. They are an especially common problem for pregnant women.

Signs and symptoms

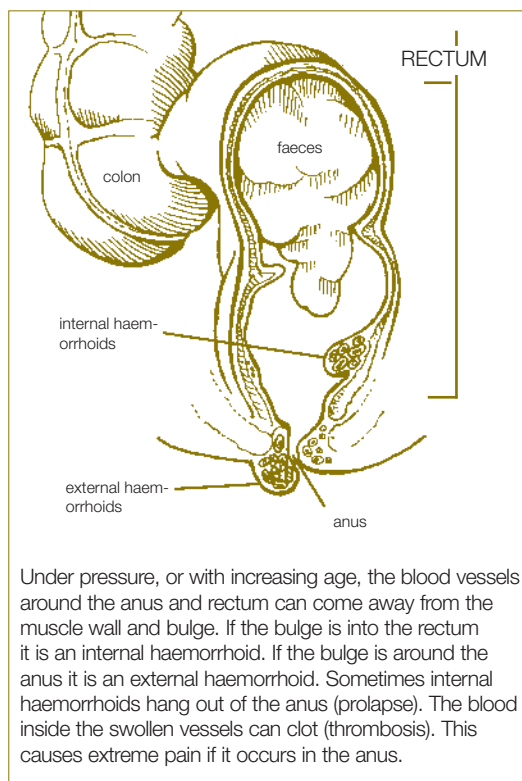
Common symptoms of haemorrhoids include:

- Pain – usually a dull ache that gets worse when opening bowels
- Irritation – discomfort, burning, itching – often the most troublesome symptom
- Bleeding – bright red blood on toilet paper or on the surface of the stool (faeces/bowel motion)
- Bulge or tag of skin around the anus.

Causes

Causes of haemorrhoids include:

- Constipation – this may be due to medicines – ask a pharmacist
- Not enough fibre in diet
- Not drinking enough water, or dehydration
- Straining to pass a bowel motion
- Delaying or putting off opening bowels
- Pregnancy and childbirth
- Obesity
- Coughing, sneezing, vomiting
- Straining (e.g., when doing heavy lifting or carrying)
- Sitting most of the day.



Under pressure, or with increasing age, the blood vessels around the anus and rectum can come away from the muscle wall and bulge. If the bulge is into the rectum it is an internal haemorrhoid. If the bulge is around the anus it is an external haemorrhoid. Sometimes internal haemorrhoids hang out of the anus (prolapse). The blood inside the swollen vessels can clot (thrombosis). This causes extreme pain if it occurs in the anus.

Important

Consult a doctor if:

- There is bleeding or oozing from the rectum or anus
- You have a change in bowel habit
- The haemorrhoid is hanging out of the anus (prolapsed)
- You think your constipation may be caused by medicines

- You have stomach pain or vomiting
- Symptoms become worse or don't improve after seven days of treatment.

Note: Rectal and anal discomfort and bleeding are also symptoms of other medical conditions such as threadworm infection, sexually transmitted disease, incontinence, irritable bowel disease, bowel cancer, psoriasis and thrush.

Medicines

Rectal creams, ointments and suppositories, can relieve discomfort and help shrink haemorrhoids. They are available from pharmacies without a prescription. Ask a pharmacist for advice.

- For best results, use haemorrhoid products morning and night, and after each bowel action.
- Clean the skin around the anus before application.
- If using a rectal applicator for creams or ointments, lubricate it before use and wash it well afterwards.

Suppositories can be used for internal haemorrhoids. Remove the foil or plastic cover and insert the suppository into the rectum with a finger, while crouching or lying down.

- Suppositories are easier to insert if they are firm. Store them in a cool place or in the fridge.
- Most haemorrhoid products are safe to use during pregnancy.

Common ingredients in haemorrhoid products

Type	Ingredient	Action
Topical corticosteroids	hydrocortisone; prednisolone; fluocortolone	reduce itching inflammation and swelling
Local anaesthetics	benzocaine; lignocaine; cinchocaine	reduce pain and itching
Skin protection and healing	zinc oxide; resorcinol; peru balsam; adrenaline; hamamelis; allantoin; aluminium acetate	soothe, protect, shrink

Self care

One of the most important ways to both manage and prevent haemorrhoids is to keep stools (faeces) soft and easy to pass by:

- Eating plenty of foods containing fibre (e.g., cereals, grains, wholemeal breads, fresh fruit and vegetables)
- Drinking at least two litres (eight glasses) of water each day (check with a doctor if you have kidney or heart problems)
- Taking a laxative if necessary – ask a pharmacist.

Other ways to help manage haemorrhoids include:

- Ensure good toilet hygiene – clean the area around the anus with warm water after passing a motion – dab rather than rub dry, to avoid irritating the swollen veins. Moist towels such as ‘baby wipes’ work well (use perfume and alcohol – free wipes)
- Have a warm (about 40°C) bath, especially after going to the toilet, to relieve discomfort
- Apply a cold compress to the anus to shrink blood vessels

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

- Do not strain to pass a motion
- Do not sit on the toilet for more than two minutes trying to pass a motion
- Exercise regularly, to develop and maintain good abdominal muscle tone
- Learn to lift properly to prevent straining.

Related fact cards

- *Back Pain*
- *Constipation*
- *Fibre & Bowel Health*
- *Threadworms*

For more information

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacy Self Care Support – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

