

## Haemorrhoids

Often described as “varicose veins of the anus and rectum”, haemorrhoids are formed as supporting tissues stretch and allow the blood vessels to expand. When this stretching and pressure continues the vessels can protrude.

Internal haemorrhoids form from within the anus and can cause painless bleeding or a protrusion which occurs during bowel movements. They can also lead to pain, itch and mucous discharge.

External haemorrhoids form near the anus on the outside and may be covered by sensitive skin. If a blood clot forms in an external swelling this is called a thrombosed external haemorrhoid. This can cause sudden pain which gets worse during the first 48 hours. The pain generally lessens over the next few days. You may notice bleeding if the skin on top of the swelling opens.

### Causes

The exact cause of haemorrhoids is unknown but factors which may contribute include:

- Aging
- Pregnancy
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Straining on the toilet
- Spending long periods on the toilet e.g. reading

### Symptoms

Any of the following may be a sign of haemorrhoids although can be caused by other bowel conditions.

- Bleeding and/ or protrusion of skin during bowel movements
- Itching and/ or pain in the anal area
- Sensitive lump(s)

### Non-surgical treatment

With non-surgical treatment, pain and swelling usually decrease in 2-7 days. The firm lump should recede within 2-4 weeks. Treatment includes:

- A high-fibre diet or taking an over-the-counter fibre supplement e.g. Fybogel. Traditional over the counter creams such as Anusol or Preparation-H can help.

### ***More than 50% of haemorrhoids will resolve with fibre alone***

- Avoid straining to reduce pressure on haemorrhoids and help prevent protrusion
- Drink more water to help prevent hard stools
- Regular warm baths for 10-20 minutes several times per day helps soothe the area
- Your pharmacist may be able to advise on steroid or anaesthetic suppositories or cream to help with the symptoms

## **Surgical treatment**

Surgical treatment is rarely considered in the emergency setting due to risk of complications including:

- Delayed bleeding
- Infection
- Delayed Wound Healing
- Incontinence
- Anal Stricture i.e. narrowing of the back passage that can make going to the toilet difficult and uncomfortable.

Pain often settles as quickly with non-surgical treatment.

If non-surgical treatment fails to improve the problems from your haemorrhoids or if symptoms recur frequently then your GP may recommend referral to a surgical clinic at the hospital.