

# Haemorrhoids

(also known as 'piles')

**Haemorrhoids develop when vein-filled, cushion-like areas of tissue in the lining of the anus become swollen. They are often caused by pressure in the bowel or hard faeces. Haemorrhoids can be treated with medicines, diet and anal care.**

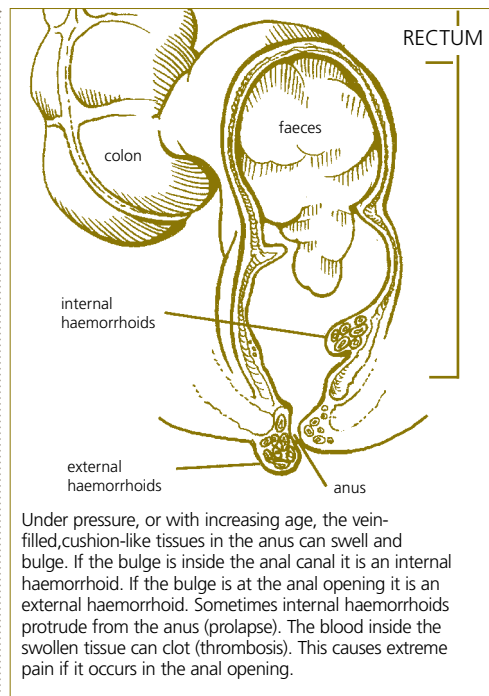
Haemorrhoids are very common. They can develop in anyone at any age, but are rare in young people under 20 years of age. They are an especially common problem for pregnant women.

Haemorrhoids inside the anal opening, on the wall of the anal canal are called internal haemorrhoids. Haemorrhoids at the anal opening are called external haemorrhoids.

## Signs and symptoms

Common symptoms of haemorrhoids include:

- Pain or discomfort – usually a dull ache that gets worse during a bowel movement
- Anal irritation, burning, itching – often the most troublesome symptom



Under pressure, or with increasing age, the vein-filled, cushion-like tissues in the anus can swell and bulge. If the bulge is inside the anal canal it is an internal haemorrhoid. If the bulge is at the anal opening it is an external haemorrhoid. Sometimes internal haemorrhoids protrude from the anus (prolapse). The blood inside the swollen tissue can clot (thrombosis). This causes extreme pain if it occurs in the anal opening.

- Bleeding – bright red blood on toilet paper or on the surface of the faeces (bowel motion)
- A haemorrhoid protruding from the anus
- A lump or swelling in the anus
- Leakage of faeces.

## Causes

It is not definitely known why haemorrhoids develop, but it is thought that increased pressure in the anus is a major factor.

Possible causes of haemorrhoids include:

- Constipation or hard faeces – which may be due to medicines, a low fibre diet or not drinking enough water
- Straining to pass a bowel motion
- Diarrhoea
- 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
- Ageing, which leads to weakening of the tissue lining the anus
- Some medical conditions (e.g., inflammatory bowel disease)
- Rectal and anal surgery
- Anal intercourse.

## Self care

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

- Eating plenty of foods containing fibre (e.g. cereals, grains, wholemeal breads, fruits, vegetables)
- Drinking enough water every day to satisfy your thirst and to keep your urine 'light-coloured' (unless a doctor advises not to)
- Taking a fibre supplement if necessary – ask a pharmacist.

Other ways to help manage haemorrhoids include:

- Ensure good toilet hygiene – gently clean the area around the anus with warm water at least once a day and after passing a motion. Moist towels such as 'baby wipes' also work well (use perfume- and alcohol-free wipes). Pat rather than rub dry, to avoid irritating the swollen tissue. The area may be gently dried with a hair dryer
- Sit in a warm bath, especially after going to the toilet, to relieve discomfort
- Apply a cold compress to the anus to relieve swelling
- Sit on an inflatable 'doughnut' ring cushion to reduce pressure on the anal area when sitting
- Do not strain to pass a motion and do not sit on the toilet for long periods of time

## Important

Consult a doctor if you suspect you have a haemorrhoid and:

- There is bleeding or oozing from your anus
- You have a persistent change in bowel habit
- A haemorrhoid is protruding from your anus (prolapsed)
- You have sharp, stabbing pain when passing faeces
- You have stomach pain or vomiting

- You have a fever
- Symptoms become worse or don't improve after seven days of treatment
- You have constipation that may be caused by medicines.

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

## Medicines

Rectal 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 ointment, 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 and breastfeeding.

## Some common ingredients in haemorrhoid products

Type	Ingredient	Action
<b>Topical corticosteroids</b>	hydrocortisone, prednisolone,	reduce itching and inflammation/swelling
<b>Local anaesthetics</b>	lignocaine, cinchocaine	reduce pain and itching
<b>Skin protection and healing</b>	zinc oxide, hamamelis, allantoin, aluminium acetate	soothe and protect

- Do not put off the urge to open bowels
- Exercise regularly, to develop and maintain good abdominal muscle tone. Pelvic floor exercises can help prevent haemorrhoids
- Learn to lift properly to prevent straining
- Avoid long periods of standing or sitting, which can increase pressure in the anus
- Wear cotton underwear, avoid synthetic fabrics.

## For more information

### Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

### Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

### National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

### The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26  
from anywhere in Australia.

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

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Your Self Care Pharmacy: