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# Hemorrhoids

## Public Education

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## Abstract

Hemorrhoids, commonly referred to as piles, are swollen veins in the lower rectum and anus. They are a widespread condition, affecting millions of people globally. This article provides a detailed overview of hemorrhoids, including their types, risk factors, causes, symptoms, pathophysiology, complications, diagnosis, and treatment options. It aims to serve as an informative resource for the public, patients, and their loved ones, offering valuable insights into managing and treating this often uncomfortable and distressing condition.

## Introduction to Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are a common condition characterized by swollen and inflamed veins in the lower rectum and anus. They can cause significant discomfort, itching, pain, and bleeding, especially during bowel movements.

Hemorrhoids can be internal, occurring inside the rectum, or external, forming under the skin around the anus. While hemorrhoids are rarely dangerous, they can significantly affect a person's quality of life (1-3).

## Types of Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are classified into two main types: internal and external. Internal hemorrhoids develop inside the rectum and are typically painless, although they may cause bleeding during bowel movements. In severe cases, internal hemorrhoids can prolapse, extending outside the anus, which can be painful and require medical attention. External hemorrhoids, on the other hand, form under the skin around the anus. These can be itchy and painful and may sometimes bleed. Thrombosed external hemorrhoids occur when blood pools in an external hemorrhoid and forms a clot, causing severe pain and swelling. Each type of hemorrhoid requires different approaches to treatment and management.

## Risk Factors of Hemorrhoids

Several factors can increase the risk of developing hemorrhoids. These include chronic constipation or diarrhea, straining during bowel movements, prolonged sitting on the toilet, and a low-fiber diet. Pregnancy is another significant risk factor, as the growing uterus puts pressure on the veins in the rectum and anus. Aging also increases the risk of hemorrhoids, as the tissues supporting the veins in the rectum and anus can weaken and stretch. Obesity, heavy lifting, and genetics can also contribute to the development of hemorrhoids.

## Epidemiology of Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are a common condition worldwide, with a prevalence estimated to be around 4.4% in the general

population. They are more common in adults aged 45 to 65 years and are equally prevalent in men and women. However, the incidence of hemorrhoids increases with age, and they are particularly common in pregnant women due to the increased pressure on the pelvic veins. Hemorrhoids are also more common in people with a family history of the condition, suggesting a genetic component. The condition is prevalent across different populations and regions, highlighting the need for widespread awareness and management strategies.

## Causes of Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are caused by increased pressure in the lower rectum, leading to swelling and inflammation of the veins. This pressure can result from straining during bowel movements, chronic constipation or diarrhea, and sitting for long periods on the toilet. Pregnancy increases the risk of hemorrhoids due to the pressure exerted by the growing uterus on the veins in the rectum and anus. Other factors include a low-fiber diet, which can lead to constipation and straining, and heavy lifting, which can increase abdominal pressure. Genetic predisposition also plays a role, with certain genes being associated with a higher risk of developing hemorrhoids.

## Symptoms of Hemorrhoids

The symptoms of hemorrhoids can vary depending on the type and severity of the condition. Common symptoms include itching, discomfort, and pain around the anus, especially during bowel movements. Internal hemorrhoids may cause painless rectal bleeding, often noticed as bright red blood on toilet paper or in the toilet bowl. In contrast, external hemorrhoids can cause significant pain and swelling, particularly if they become thrombosed. Prolapsed internal hemorrhoids can cause pain and

discomfort when sitting or during bowel movements. Recognizing these symptoms is crucial for seeking appropriate medical advice and treatment.

## Pathophysiology of Hemorrhoids

The pathophysiology of hemorrhoids involves the dilation and swelling of the veins in the rectum and anus. This occurs due to increased pressure in the lower rectum, which can be caused by various factors such as straining during bowel movements, chronic constipation or diarrhea, and prolonged sitting. The increased pressure causes the veins to stretch and swell, leading to the formation of hemorrhoids. In addition, the supporting tissues in the rectum and anus can weaken with age, further contributing to the development of hemorrhoids. Thrombosed hemorrhoids occur when a blood clot forms in a swollen vein, causing severe pain and swelling.

## Complications of Hemorrhoids

Although hemorrhoids are generally not life-threatening, they can lead to several complications if left untreated. These include anemia due to chronic blood loss, which can result in fatigue and weakness. Thrombosed hemorrhoids can cause severe pain and swelling, requiring medical intervention. Prolapsed hemorrhoids can become trapped outside the anus, leading to significant discomfort and potential infection. In rare cases, untreated hemorrhoids can cause persistent pain and bleeding, leading to a need for surgical intervention.

## Diagnosis of Hemorrhoids

Diagnosing hemorrhoids involves a thorough medical history and physical examination. The healthcare provider may perform a visual inspection of the anus and rectum to check for external hemorrhoids. Internal hemorrhoids may

require a digital rectal exam, where the doctor inserts a gloved, lubricated finger into the rectum to feel for abnormalities. In some cases, additional tests such as an anoscopy, sigmoidoscopy, or colonoscopy may be needed to rule out other conditions and confirm the diagnosis. These procedures involve inserting a small, lighted tube into the rectum to provide a clear view of the internal structures.

## Treatment of Hemorrhoids

Treatment for hemorrhoids depends on the severity of the condition and the type of hemorrhoid. For mild cases, lifestyle changes and home remedies are often effective. These include eating a high-fiber diet, drinking plenty of fluids, and avoiding straining during bowel movements. Over-the-counter creams and ointments, such as hydrocortisone (Anusol-HC), can help reduce inflammation and relieve symptoms. For more severe cases, medical treatments such as rubber band ligation, sclerotherapy, and infrared coagulation may be recommended. These procedures aim to reduce the blood supply to the hemorrhoid, causing it to shrink. In severe or persistent cases, surgical options such as hemorrhoidectomy or stapled hemorrhoidopexy may be necessary.

## Prognosis of Hemorrhoids

The prognosis for hemorrhoids is generally good, especially with appropriate treatment and lifestyle changes. Many people experience significant relief from symptoms with conservative treatments and home remedies. In more severe cases, medical procedures and surgery can effectively manage the condition and prevent recurrence. However, maintaining a healthy diet, staying hydrated, and avoiding prolonged sitting and straining are essential for preventing the recurrence of hemorrhoids. Regular follow-up with a healthcare provider can help monitor the

condition and address any complications promptly. Overall, with proper management, most individuals with hemorrhoids can achieve good outcomes and maintain a high quality of life.

## Conclusion

Hemorrhoids are a common and often distressing condition that affects millions of people worldwide. Understanding the different aspects of hemorrhoids, from their types and causes to their symptoms and treatment options, is essential for effective management. Recognizing the risk factors and seeking a proper diagnosis are crucial steps in addressing the condition. With appropriate treatment and lifestyle changes, individuals with hemorrhoids can significantly improve their symptoms and quality of life. Early detection, appropriate treatment, and preventive measures are key to managing hemorrhoids effectively.

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