

# HEMORRHOIDS

## WE ALL HAVE THEM!

### WHAT ARE THEY?

Hemorrhoids are essentially swollen blood vessels with overlying tissue.

They can be inside or outside your body. **Internal hemorrhoids** are blood vessels within the rectum and, if enlarged, can bleed or come out of your body. Internal hemorrhoids can be painful. **External hemorrhoids** are on the anus itself and are essentially skin that has stretched out. External hemorrhoids can cause itching or difficulty cleaning after bowel movements, but are not painful.

These blood vessels are part of the muscles that help you to poop. If enlarged, they do not prevent you from pooping. However, if you have problems pooping, they will likely become enlarged.

The most common cause of hemorrhoids is constipation or straining while using the toilet, but diarrhea can also aggravate hemorrhoids. Women are prone to hemorrhoids during pregnancy and after birth because of increased pressure on the pelvis. Constipation leads to hemorrhoids — hemorrhoids do not cause constipation. In addition, prolonged sitting (including on the toilet) can cause hemorrhoids.

### WHAT CAN I DO AT HOME?

#### Avoid straining, constipation and diarrhea

The most important thing you can do for hemorrhoids is to avoid straining with bowel movements and avoid constipation (and diarrhea). If you poop better, your hemorrhoids will get better.

- Eat more fiber. Good food sources include bananas, pears, strawberries, avocados, carrots, beets, broccoli, spinach, legumes, oats, nuts, seeds and sweet potatoes.
- You need at least 25-35g/day of fiber — consider an over-the-counter supplement.
- Drink plenty of fluids: at least 6-8 glasses of water per day.
- Use a stool softener that contains bran or psyllium.
- Stay physically active.

#### Practice healthy bathroom habits

- Don't delay — use the toilet as soon as you have the urge. Putting off bowel movements leads to constipation.
- Avoid straining to pass stools. Relax and give yourself time to let things happen naturally. Also, do not hold your breath while having a bowel movement.
- Do not sit for prolonged periods of time on the toilet, as it puts unwanted pressure on the blood vessels/hemorrhoids. Get off the toilet as soon as you're finished.
- Try elevating your feet with a step stool as you sit on the toilet. This changes the position of the rectum and may allow for easier passage of stool.
- Use plain, unscented, hypo-allergenic wipes or a bidet to clean yourself. Wipe gently. Barrier creams like zinc oxide can help with itching and burning.

# HEMORRHOIDS (continued)

## WHAT CAN I DO WHEN I'M HAVING A LOT OF PAIN OR BLEEDING?

- Soak in a warm and shallow bath for 15-20 minutes. The warm water helps with the pain. Epsom salts are not needed. If unable to get into a bathtub, sitz baths can be purchased at a pharmacy and placed on a toilet to allow you to easily soak your bottom.
- Over-the-counter steroid medications like Preparation H or Tucks medicated pads can help. Apply the Preparation H or Tucks medication after every bowel movement, and for at least 3 consecutive days.
- Use an ice pack 3-4 times a day for 10 minutes to relieve pain. (**Important:** Remember to use a clean cloth between the ice and skin to prevent an ice-burn injury).
- Wear breathable cotton underwear and loose clothing to decrease moisture in the anal area.

## WHAT IF NONE OF THIS WORKS?

Then it's time to consider a procedure or surgical option. All of the above recommendations need to be tried prior to intervention otherwise the hemorrhoids will just return. If you fall back into bad habits after hemorrhoid treatments, they will return that much faster.

- If you are not up-to-date on your screening colonoscopy, you will need to have one done to rule out other sources of bleeding.
- It is important to know that any intervention comes with discomfort; some are worse than others.

### Procedures and surgical options include:

#### **Banding** (internal hemorrhoids only)

- A rubber band is placed around the hemorrhoid, which causes it to shrink and fall off — usually 5-7 days after placement and usually during a bowel movement.
- You can expect pressure and feeling the need to poop for 24-48 hours.
- Bleeding can persist until the hemorrhoid falls off.
- This procedure can be done in the office.

#### **Sclerotherapy** (internal hemorrhoids only)

- A special injection is administered which causes the hemorrhoid to shrink.
- Sclerotherapy is often used for patients on blood thinners.
- This procedure is usually done with sedation.

Banding and sclerotherapy work well for small- and moderate-sized hemorrhoids. These procedures may need to be repeated, or may not be sufficient for large-sized hemorrhoids. However, they are always a good first option as they involve minimal downtime and discomfort.

#### **Hemorrhoidectomy**

- A surgical procedure, typically done in an operating room, where the hemorrhoid is cut off.
- This option has very painful recovery. The worst of the pain occurs during bowel movements and can last for 4-6 weeks after surgery.
- Note: While this surgery may be necessary if hemorrhoids are very large, we typically try all other alternatives first because of the painful recovery.