

HAEMORRHOIDS

WHAT ARE HAEMORRHOIDS?

Haemorrhoids, often called **piles**, are swollen veins in the anal passage. They can occur near the surface of the anus (*external haemorrhoids*) or higher in the anal canal (*internal haemorrhoids*). Sometimes, haemorrhoids can protrude outside the anus (prolapsing haemorrhoids).

Symptoms include bleeding from the anus, particularly when having a bowel movement; pain; itching and burning.

CAUSE

Haemorrhoids are normally caused by inadequate fibre or fluid intake, leading to constipation. This leads the sufferer to strain when defecating, resulting in a loss of elasticity in the veins of the anus wall.

HAEMORRHOIDS DURING PREGNANCY

Up to 50% of women suffer from haemorrhoids in pregnancy. The growing weight of the baby, combined with an increase in circulating blood volume, puts extra pressure on blood vessels and causes the veins to dilate, leading to haemorrhoids. Constipation, which often accompanies pregnancy, can also cause or aggravate haemorrhoids.

OVER THE COUNTER TREATMENT IN PHARMACIES

Apart from preventing and treating constipation the following products can be used for piles:

- **Anusol[®]** - Anusol[®] comes in cream or ointment or suppositories. Anusol[®] contains zinc oxide which is a good moisteriser and healing agent. It also contains bismuth which acts as an astringent tightening the skin in the area and providing support for damaged veins. Thirdly anusol products have a mild antiseptic action reducing the risk of infection.
- Anusol HC[®] is available where there is a lot of inflammation but should be used for no more than a week at a time.
- Hemoclin[®] Gel is new on the market and contains an easy to use applicator. It cools and treats the piles.

If these products fail to work, you should see your doctor as there are stronger products available on prescription.

You should see your doctor if:

- Piles are present for more than 3 weeks.
- There is associated abdominal pain or vomiting.
- Severe anal bleeding.
- Sudden weight loss.
- Children.

HOW CAN I RELIEVE THE DISCOMFORT?

To relieve the discomfort of haemorrhoids:

- Relax in a warm bath to relieve the itching and pain.
- Apply ice packs to the area a couple of times a day.
- Avoid sitting or standing for long periods as this puts more pressure on the rectal veins.
- Wash and dry the area carefully every time you have a bowel movement.
- Lubricate the anus with a haemorrhoid cream to assist the passage of stools. If the haemorrhoids prolapse outside of the anus they can be gently pushed back in using some lubricating haemorrhoid cream.
- Local application of haemorrhoid creams and painkillers may help relieve the symptoms.

In some cases minor surgery is required to remove the haemorrhoids.