



Official reprint from UpToDate®

www.uptodate.com © 2023 UpToDate, Inc. and/or its affiliates. All Rights Reserved.

Wolters Kluwer

Patient education: Hemorrhoids (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

Please read the [Disclaimer](#) at the end of this page.

What are hemorrhoids?

Hemorrhoids are swollen veins in the rectum. They can cause itching, bleeding, and pain. Hemorrhoids are very common.

In some cases, you can see or feel hemorrhoids around the outside of the rectum. In other cases, you cannot see them because they are hidden inside the rectum ([figure 1](#)).

What are the symptoms of hemorrhoids?

Hemorrhoids do not always cause symptoms. But when they do, symptoms can include:

- Itching of the skin around the anus
- Bleeding – Bleeding is usually painless. You might see bright red blood after using the toilet.
- Pain – If a blood clot forms inside a hemorrhoid, this can cause pain. It can also cause a lump that you might be able to feel.
- Swelling – Hemorrhoids can swell or dangle outside of the rectum during a bowel movement.

If you notice bleeding when you have a bowel movement, or if your bowel movements look like tar, see a doctor or nurse. Bleeding could be caused by something other than hemorrhoids, so you should have it checked out.

How can I care for myself at home?

If you do have hemorrhoids, your doctor or nurse can suggest treatments. But there some steps that you can try on your own first.

The most important thing that you can do is try to prevent constipation and keep your bowel movements soft. You should have a bowel movement at least a few times a week. Here are some steps that you can take:

- Eat lots of fruits, vegetables, and other foods with fiber ([figure 2](#)). Fiber helps to increase bowel movements.

You need 20 to 35 grams of fiber a day to keep your bowel movements regular ([table 1](#)). If you do not get enough fiber from your diet, you can take fiber supplements. These come in the form of powders, wafers, or pills. They include [psyllium](#) seed (sample brand names: Metamucil, Konsyl), [methylcellulose](#) (sample brand name: Citrucel), [polycarbophil](#) (sample brand name: FiberCon), and [wheat dextrin](#) (sample brand name: Benefiber). If you take a fiber supplement, be sure to read the label so you know how much to take. If you're not sure, ask your doctor nurse.

- Drink plenty of water and other fluids. This is especially important if you take a fiber supplement.
- Limit fatty foods and alcohol. These can make constipation worse.
- Take medicines called "stool softeners" such as [docusate](#) sodium (sample brand names: Colace, Dulcolax). These medicines increase the number of bowel movements you have. They are safe to take and they can prevent problems later.
- Take your time when having a bowel movement. But do not spend too much time on the toilet (for example, reading). Also, try not to push hard or strain when having a bowel movement.
- Get regular physical activity. Even gentle forms of exercise, like walking, are good for your health.

To relieve symptoms of hemorrhoids, you can:

- Soak your buttocks in 2 or 3 inches of warm water – You can do this up to 2 to 3 times a day for 10 to 15 minutes. Do not add soap, bubble bath, or anything to the water.

- Try non-prescription medicines – You can find these in a pharmacy ([table 2](#)). They include creams or ointments that you rub on your anus to relieve pain, itching, and swelling. Some hemorrhoid medicines come in a capsule (called a suppository) that you put inside your rectum. Others come in a cream that comes in a bottle with a nozzle that you put inside your rectum.

Do **not** use medicines that have [hydrocortisone](#) (a steroid medicine) for more than a week, unless your doctor or nurse approves.

Are there other treatments for hemorrhoids?

Yes. If you still have symptoms after trying the steps listed above, you might need treatments to destroy or remove the hemorrhoids.

One popular treatment for hemorrhoids inside the rectum is called "rubber band ligation." For this treatment, the doctor ties tiny rubber bands around the hemorrhoids. A few days later the hemorrhoids shrink and stop bleeding. Doctors can also use lasers, heat, or chemicals to destroy hemorrhoids.

If none of these options works, your doctor might suggest surgery to remove or tie off the blood vessels of the hemorrhoids. Hemorrhoids on the outside of the rectum can only be removed with surgery.

When should I call my doctor or nurse?

Call for advice if:

- You have new or increased bleeding from your rectum.
- You have tissue sticking out from your rectum that you can't push back in.
- You are not able to pass bowel movements because of pain.
- Your symptoms are getting worse even with home care.
- You have a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher.

More on this topic

[Patient education: Constipation in adults \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: High-fiber diet \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Pregnancy symptoms \(The Basics\)](#)

Patient education: Hemorrhoids (Beyond the Basics)

All topics are updated as new evidence becomes available and our [peer review process](#) is complete.

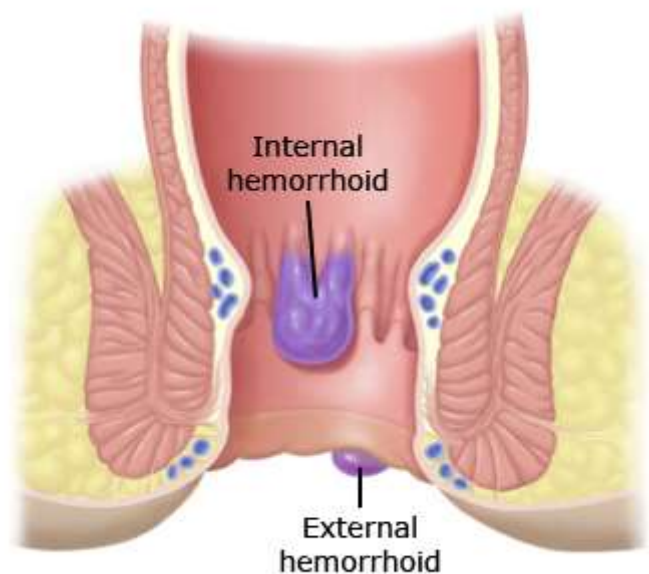
This topic retrieved from UpToDate on: Jun 22, 2023.

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved for treating a specific patient. UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates disclaim any warranty or liability relating to this information or the use thereof. The use of this information is governed by the Terms of Use, available at <https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/know/clinical-effectiveness-terms> ©2023 UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates and/or licensors. All rights reserved.

Topic 15404 Version 16.0

GRAPHICS

Hemorrhoids



Hemorrhoids that are hidden inside the rectum are called "internal" hemorrhoids. You cannot see them, but they can cause symptoms. Hemorrhoids that you can see or feel are called "external" hemorrhoids.

Graphic 73076 Version 2.0

Foods with fiber



Foods with a lot of fiber include prunes, apples, oranges, bananas, peas, green beans, kidney beans, cooked oatmeal, almonds, peanuts, and whole-wheat bread.

Graphic 79063 Version 1.0

Amount of fiber in different foods

Food	Serving	Grams of fiber
Fruits		
Apple (with skin)	1 medium apple	4.4
Banana	1 medium banana	3.1
Oranges	1 orange	3.1
Prunes	1 cup, pitted	12.4
Juices		
Apple, unsweetened, with added ascorbic acid	1 cup	0.5
Grapefruit, white, canned, sweetened	1 cup	0.2
Grape, unsweetened, with added ascorbic acid	1 cup	0.5
Orange	1 cup	0.7
Vegetables		
Cooked		
▪ Green beans	1 cup	4.0
▪ Carrots	1/2 cup sliced	2.3
▪ Peas	1 cup	8.8
▪ Potato (baked, with skin)	1 medium potato	3.8
Raw		
▪ Cucumber (with peel)	1 cucumber	1.5
▪ Lettuce	1 cup shredded	0.5
▪ Tomato	1 medium tomato	1.5
▪ Spinach	1 cup	0.7
Legumes		
▪ Baked beans, canned, no salt added	1 cup	13.9
▪ Kidney beans, canned	1 cup	13.6
▪ Lima beans, canned	1 cup	11.6
▪ Lentils, boiled	1 cup	15.6

Breads, pastas, flours		
Bran muffins	1 medium muffin	5.2
Oatmeal, cooked	1 cup	4.0
White bread	1 slice	0.6
Whole-wheat bread	1 slice	1.9
Pasta and rice, cooked		
▪ Macaroni	1 cup	2.5
▪ Rice, brown	1 cup	3.5
▪ Rice, white	1 cup	0.6
▪ Spaghetti (regular)	1 cup	2.5
Nuts		
Almonds	1/2 cup	8.7
Peanuts	1/2 cup	7.9

To learn how much fiber and other nutrients are in different foods, visit the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) FoodData Central website.

Data from: USDA FoodData Central. Available at: <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/> (Accessed on October 11, 2019).

Graphic 52349 Version 6.0

Common at-home treatments for hemorrhoids

Type of medicine	Examples	Notes
Stool softener	Docusate sodium (sample brand names: Colace, Docu, Stool Softener)	Softens bowel movements Helps avoid straining while sitting on toilet
Bulk-forming laxatives and fiber supplements	Methylcellulose (sample brand names: Citrucel, Soluble Fiber Therapy) Polycarbophil (sample brand names: FiberCon, Konsyl Fiber) Psyllium (sample brand names: Metamucil, Konsyl) Wheat dextrin (sample brand name: Benefiber)	Prevent hard dry stools which make hemorrhoids worse Might reduce bleeding and other hemorrhoid symptoms Needs to be taken with plenty of water (8 glasses of water a day) Your doctor might suggest starting with a small dose and then increasing over time
Pain relief	Pramoxine rectal foam, ointment, or wipes (sample brand names: Proctofoam, Pramox)	Can help with pain and itching Area must be gently cleaned and allowed to dry before using
Medicines to dry or protect skin	Witch hazel (sample brand names: Tucks, Preparation H pads, Preparation H wipes) Zinc oxide topical paste (sample brand names: Boudreaux's Butt Paste, Desitin)	May dry or tighten skin around the anus Zinc oxide also protects skin from irritation Area must be gently cleaned and allowed to dry before using Can apply after a sitz bath (soaking in warm, shallow water) Witch hazel wipes or unscented baby wipes can be used to clean the anus after a bowel movement
Steroid cream	Hydrocortisone rectal cream (sample brand name: Preparation H hydrocortisone)	Reduces swelling, and pain caused by hemorrhoids Do not use for longer than a week Do not use at all if you are pregnant unless your doctor or nurse tells you to
Medicines to shrink	Phenylephrine ointment or suppository (sample brand names:	Phenylephrine shrinks swollen hemorrhoids, and relieves itching and

hemorrhoids	Preparation H, Rectacaine)	discomfort for a few hours Area must be gently cleaned and allowed to dry before applying
Numbing ointments	Benzocaine rectal ointment (sample brand name: Americaine) Dibucaine rectal ointment (sample brand name: Nupercainal) Lidocaine rectal cream (sample brand name: RectiCare)	Benzocaine, dibucaine, and lidocaine can help with pain and itching, but should not be used without talking to a doctor first. They should only be used once in a while, in small amounts.

- This table lists some examples of over-the-counter treatments for hemorrhoids. There are many more brand-name and generic versions available, too. Read all labels to make sure you're not using too much of one ingredient.
- Do not use over-the-counter treatments for more than one week without speaking to your doctor. They can damage your skin.
- Follow instructions carefully – for example, it's important to clean and dry your skin before using creams or ointments. You can use an unscented baby wipe to clean your anus after a bowel movement.
- If you have rectal bleeding, or if your bowel movements look like tar, see your doctor or nurse. These problems could be caused by something other than hemorrhoids. You should also see your doctor or nurse if your hemorrhoid symptoms still bother you after you have tried taking care of them yourself.

Graphic 104732 Version 7.0

