



Hemorrhoids are swollen inflamed veins that develop in the lower rectum (anus). Internal hemorrhoids happen inside the anal canal. External hemorrhoids happen at the anal opening and may hang outside the anus. These veins often become enlarged and inflamed when we strain to pass hard, compact stools. Some other causes of hemorrhoids are sitting or standing for long periods of time, being overweight, being pregnant, or having other health conditions (such as liver cirrhosis) that increase pressure in the veins.

The symptoms of hemorrhoids include:

- Leakage of mucus from the anus.
- Irritation or itching around the anus.
- Discomfort during bowel movements.
- Tender lumps near the anus.

Sometimes a hemorrhoid will actually stick out of the anus and may have to be pushed back into place with a finger. Although they can cause discomfort, hemorrhoids do not usually cause severe pain unless a blood clot forms in the vein. A clotted hemorrhoid (also called “thrombosed”) can be extremely painful but is not dangerous.

While itching around the anus may be a symptom of hemorrhoids, it is often caused by other conditions. If the anus is not kept clean, itching may result.

Any fecal seepage that comes with diarrhea can irritate the skin around the anus. Trying to keep the area too clean by rubbing with dry toilet paper or using excess soap can also injure the skin. While it is important to keep the skin in the anal area clean, it is also important to be gentle when doing so.

Although uncomfortable at times, hemorrhoids rarely pose a serious health problem. They generally last several days and often come back (recur). Nearly everyone, in fact, has hemorrhoids at some time. There are, however, steps you can take to reduce your discomfort from hemorrhoids and help prevent them from recurring.

How to prevent hemorrhoids

- Try to keep your stools soft. Be sure to include plenty of water, fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in your diet. Add two tablespoons of bran or a commercial fiber product such as Citrucel or Metamucil to your diet each day.
- Avoid using laxatives, because they may cause diarrhea which can irritate hemorrhoids.
- For information about how to prevent and treat constipation, search online at kp.org. If you have compact, hard stools, try using stool softeners to help reduce straining.

- Exercise every day to promote regular bowel movements.
 - Avoid sitting or standing too much. This restricts blood flow around the anus. Take short walks to increase blood flow in your pelvic region.
 - Go to the bathroom as soon as you have the urge. Try not to strain during bowel movements. Remember to take your time and never hold your breath.
 - If you are pregnant, try sleeping on your side to relieve the pressure on your pelvic area.
 - Keep your anal area clean. More importantly, be gentle when cleaning yourself. Try not to scratch the area.
- ### Home treatment
- Taking warm baths can be soothing and cleansing, especially after a bowel movement.
 - Try using pre-moistened tissues (baby wipes), medicated pads such as Tucks, or moistened toilet paper instead of dry toilet paper.
 - Wear cotton underwear and loose clothing.
- Relieve itching by using cold compresses on the anus four times a day, ten minutes at a time.
 - Sitz baths (hot baths with just enough water to cover the anal area for 10 to 15 minutes) can be soothing, but may worsen itching.
 - Use medicated suppositories to relieve pain and lubricate the anal canal during a bowel movement. These medications are available over the counter.
 - Ease itching and irritation with zinc oxide, petroleum jelly, or hydrocortisone (1 percent) cream. Ask your physician before using any product that contains a local anesthetic. These products have the suffix “-caine” in the name of the product or in the name of one of the ingredients. Such products can cause allergic reactions in some people.
- ### Call Kaiser Permanente if:
- Any bleeding continues for longer than one week despite home treatment.
 - Pain is severe or lasts longer than one week after home treatment.
- Bleeding occurs for no apparent reason and is not associated with straining to pass stools.
 - A lump on the anus is increasing in size or becoming more painful and you develop a fever.
 - Fever accompanies bloody stools.
 - Stools become more narrow than usual (maybe no wider than a pencil).
 - Any unusual material or tissue seeps or sticks out of the anus.

Other resources:

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.