



Fact sheet What are haemorrhoids?

Haemorrhoids are the result of anal cushions full of veins that come down out of the anus. They are also known as piles. They are usually noticed as lumps outside of your back passage (bottom), and they can cause quite a lot of pain or discomfort. Some people can have haemorrhoids however without feeling pain. Haemorrhoids may also be itchy at times.

Sometimes women may experience haemorrhoids for the first time during pregnancy or after the birth. They can be caused by the hormonal changes of pregnancy that soften the walls of the veins and cause them to protrude so that you can feel them outside your bottom. The extra weight from the uterus on the bowel and pelvic veins may also contribute to the development of haemorrhoids. Constipation during or after pregnancy can increase the chance of haemorrhoids developing, so it is important that you gain further advice if you are constipated rather than allowing it to continue. The pushing stage of labour can also place strain on the pelvic floor and back passage area, and this may be when haemorrhoids first occur.

Sometimes women may notice blood on the toilet paper after passing a bowel motion. If this occurs, or you notice haemorrhoids for the first time, check with your doctor or your midwife if you are in hospital.

What can be done to help haemorrhoids?

There are creams that can be used on the haemorrhoids that help to make them more comfortable. Creams with steroids will help your haemorrhoid reduce in size – ask your pharmacist for advice. Doctors can treat haemorrhoids that do not go away by themselves.

Usually during pregnancy and after childbirth, haemorrhoids may be temporary. This means that they will often reduce in size or go away completely with other treatment.

This includes:

- **Try not to strain when using your bowel**

Straining will continue to place pressure on them and may cause them to increase in size, rather than decrease or go away. Place your feet on a footstool when you use your bowel, this will help to open up your back passage more easily. Take your time when you use your bowel so that you are less likely to strain.

- **Support your perineum area when you use your bowel**

Use a pad or toilet paper to hold your perineum area (at the front of your back passage and over your vagina). This will help to reduce the amount of downwards strain on the back passage area.

- **Take something to make it easier to go to the toilet**

There are natural products that can be taken to help make it easier to go to the toilet after you have had your baby and during pregnancy. Your midwife, doctor or pharmacist can give you advice on what is safe for you to take.

- **Consider your diet and fluid intake**

Make sure that you have an adequate amount of dietary fibre and drink plenty of fluid. This will assist your bowel motion to be soft and easier to pass.

- **Ice**

While in hospital, midwives usually have ice pads or packs available that can be placed over the haemorrhoids. This will help reduce the swelling and discomfort that you are feeling, making you feel more comfortable. They can be easily made at home if you do continue to need them. Simply dampen a sanitary pad with a little bit of water, and place it in the freezer until you need it. These can only be used once, for hygiene reasons, as you are usually still bleeding at this stage.

- **Pelvic floor exercises**

Pelvic floor exercises can sometimes be uncomfortable to do initially if you have haemorrhoids, so just gently concentrate on lifting the back passage up and then

Fact sheet What are haemorrhoids?

letting go, don't try and hold the pelvic floor muscle contraction while the haemorrhoids are very painful. Pelvic floor muscles lift the back passage area up, and so stop haemorrhoids from becoming worse.

- **Avoid standing for long periods of time**

A lot of standing may increase the pressure to the haemorrhoids and due to the effect of gravity may encourage them to swell more. Try to lie down at regular intervals throughout the day. If you are lying on your side use two pillows between your legs.

- **Ultrasound treatment**

Ultrasound treatment by a physiotherapist over the haemorrhoids can help them to feel more comfortable and the swelling to reduce. This may be available both on maternity ward and as an outpatient, after the birth of your baby. Ultrasound treatment tends not to be recommended on haemorrhoids during pregnancy.

- **Cold witch hazel compresses**

Some people recommend that a cold compress will help the haemorrhoids to reduce in size and become more comfortable. Witch hazel ointment has also been suggested. Please seek advice from your doctor, midwife or pharmacist regarding this suggestion.

- **Ask for advice**

Remember that if you are unsure whether you have haemorrhoids or not, ask someone to check for you. Although this may be embarrassing, it will put your mind at rest and you can then use the right treatment to help them go away so that you can become more comfortable.

