HEMORRHOID CARE

WHAT IS A HEMORRHOID?
Hemorrhoids are swollen and inflamed veins in the rectum or anus. Increased pressure inside the abdomen causes the veins to become dilated. One of the main causes of increased pressure is repeatedly straining to have a bowel movement.

Two sets of veins drain the lower rectum and anus.
- Internal hemorrhoids come from swollen internal veins (located inside the rectum). Unless they are severe, internal hemorrhoids cannot be seen or felt.
- External hemorrhoids come from swollen external veins (located outside the anus). This type of hemorrhoid can be visible outside the anus and can often be felt. Sometimes blood pools in the dilated vein and forms a small clot, which is extremely painful.

WHO IS AT RISK?
Anyone whose lifestyle or physical condition could produce increased pressure within the rectum or irritation of the anus can develop hemorrhoids. Hemorrhoids may be related to:

- Prolonged sitting
- Frequent lifting of heavy objects
- Obesity
- Pregnancy
- Chronic constipation
- Chronic loose stools

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?
- External hemorrhoids are covered with pain-sensitive skin and often itch or hurt. They may appear as tender lumps at the edge of the anus.
- Internal hemorrhoids usually do not itch or hurt, unless significant swelling occurs.
- Bleeding is common. As a rule, chronic bleeding is usually due to internal hemorrhoids, while intermittent bleeding is usually due to external hemorrhoids. If you notice bright red blood on the toilet paper, in the toilet bowl, or coating the stool, you may have a hemorrhoid. You should still see your medical provider to make sure the cause is not something more serious, like cancer.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?
A combination of sitz baths and medications are typically used to treat mild to moderate symptoms.

- Sitz Baths
  - Sitz baths help decrease swelling and irritation. Sit in a tub with 2-3 inches of warm water for 10-15 minutes. Do this 2-3 times a day and after each bowel movement.
  - If you do not have access to a bathtub, sitz baths can be purchased in most drugstores.

- Medications
  - Tylenol and NSAIDs (eg. Ibuprofen or Aleve) can help with pain and discomfort.
  - Hydrocortisone-containing creams or suppositories are available by prescription. These medications can reduce itching and swelling. They should not be used excessively or for longer than one week because they can cause thinning of the skin.
  - Stool softeners, such as docusate (Colace), and bulk-forming fiber supplements (discussed on the next page) can help with constipation and decrease pain with bowel movements.
  - Glycerin suppositories can soothe internal hemorrhoids by lubricating the inner part of the rectum. They will also soften any stool that collects there, making it easier to pass.
  - Numbing ointments are available from your medical provider if needed.
  - Witch Hazel, which is available over-the-counter, can be applied with a cotton pad to ease itching and bleeding (though it may sting slightly). It can also help shrink hemorrhoids. Never use isopropyl alcohol!
Other
- Ice packs may help with swelling and pain.
- Avoid nuts and corn. Because they are not fully digested, they can cause further irritation to hemorrhoids.

Surgery
Most of the time, hemorrhoids respond to conservative management.
- In some cases, a minor surgical procedure performed by a specialist is needed to remove a painful clot from a hemorrhoid.
- Other surgical procedures are available for more complicated or persistent cases.

HOW DO I TREAT CONSTIPATION?
One of the most important steps in preventing and treating hemorrhoids is avoiding constipation. Consider the following suggestions. Please refer to our Constipation handout for more information.

Lifestyle Changes
- Empty the bowel as soon as you feel the urge to have a bowel movement.
- Avoid prolonged sitting, especially on a hard surface or in a vehicle. If you sit all day or drive a lot, consider purchasing a ring- or donut-shaped pillow to sit on. These pillows decrease pressure to the rectal area and are available in most pharmacies and medical supply stores.
- Take good care of your skin. External hemorrhoids are irritated through rubbing.
  - Avoid rough toilet paper.
  - Use a warm washcloth, baby wipes with glycerin (non-perfumed), or TUCKS for cleaning the skin around the anus.

Dietary Changes
- Increasing fiber in your diet will help soften stool and ease constipation. It is also effective in decreasing bleeding from hemorrhoids.

Bulk-forming fiber supplements are any easy way to add fiber to your diet.
- Examples include Metamucil, Citrucel, or Fibercon. These are available in many different forms, including powders, caplets, soft chews, and wafers.
- Aim for 20-30 grams per day. Start low and go slow to avoid bloating and gassiness.
- A tablespoon of bran, eaten with some applesauce to reduce dryness, is also a good bulking agent.

Foods high in fiber include:
- Tomatoes, lettuce, raw celery, carrots, broccoli, cauliflower, green peppers, legumes (beans and lentils).
- Whole-grain breads and cereals; unbuttered popcorn.
- Fruit with its skin, prunes, raisins, applesauce.

- Avoid highly processed pre-packaged foods, such as donuts, muffins, and fast foods (including french fries).
- Avoid foods that make you constipated. Frequent offenders include rice, pasta, and cheese.
- Try to drink at least 6-8 glasses of non-caffeinated (and non-alcoholic) fluids each day. Caffeine should be limited since it is dehydrating and can make your stool drier.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES:
- www.fascrs.org/patients/conditions/hemorrhoids
- www.mayoclinic.com