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Hemorrhoids: More than a pain in the ...

Hemorrhoids are normal vascular structures, essentially veins, located in the anal canal. They serve the function of channeling blood back to larger veins and ultimately back to the heart. Additionally, hemorrhoids assist the body in controlling the expulsion of stools, and preventing leaks.

What are the symptoms of inflamed hemorrhoids?

Hemorrhoids are painless. It is only when they get inflamed that they cause symptoms. The 3 B's associated with inflamed hemorrhoids are:

1. **Bleeding:** Typically the blood is red in color, and tends to streak on the toilet paper. It is important to remember though, that bleeding from the anal area, even if one has hemorrhoids, could be the result of more serious conditions, such as polyps, cancer or colitis. Patients with rectal bleeding should have their colon checked with a colonoscopy before assuming that the bleeding is from hemorrhoids.
2. **Burning:** A sensation of irritation in the skin around the anal area often associated with itching.
3. **Bulging:** Feeling of a lump in the anal area, which frequently is sensitive to touch.

Why do hemorrhoids become inflamed?

1. **Anal irritation:** The anal area had a rich supply of bacteria. Rubbing the skin of the anal area (as happens with excessive wiping after bowel movements, wearing tight clothing particularly underwear, sitting on hard surfaces ...) can cause the bacteria in the anal area to penetrate the layers of the skin and start an inflammation in that area, and results in inflammation of the hemorrhoids.
2. **Excessive straining:** As can happen during periods of constipation, but also in weight lifters. The straining causes the hemorrhoids to become engorged and lead to inflammation of the hemorrhoids.
3. **Prolonged sitting on the commode:** Commodes can at times be too comfortable. The seated position on the commode promotes blood to pool in the hemorrhoidal vessels causing them to become engorged and inflamed.
4. **Pregnancy:** The growing fetus puts pressure on the blood vessels, causing the blood to re-route itself through the hemorrhoidal vessel, and causing the hemorrhoids to become engorged.

How can I prevent hemorrhoids from becoming inflamed?

1. **Fiber:** Western diets are typically deficient in dietary fiber, and the addition of 15-20 gm of fiber will help you have stools that are of a softer consistency, and passing easily without the need to strain. Straining promotes the formation of hemorrhoids. The preferred type of fiber is the powder-water soluble one which could be obtained from Pharmacies.
2. **Fluid:** Drink sufficient amount of fluid during the day, to help the fiber “do its job”. Unless you have a medical condition which requires you to restrict water intake, try to drink 6-8 glasses of water a day.
3. **Do not strain:** As mentioned above, straining is a principal cause of problematic hemorrhoids. Limit your sitting on the commode to no longer than 2 minutes. Do not block the urge and hold your bowel from moving. This tends to generate harder stools that are more difficult to pass, hence the need to strain and hence the formation of hemorrhoids.
4. **Exercise:** Exercising routinely, particularly walking, jogging and hiking, are known to stimulate colonic emptying, and to stimulate the formation of soft stools that are easier to pass.

How can self- treat hemorrhoids once they are inflamed?

1. Avoid excess irritation: Wear looser clothing and underwear, substitute toilet paper with cleansing with water (there are special toilet seats that emit a jet of water, like a bidet, and that can be installed easily in place of a regular toilet seat), or when not available, using moist wipes (baby wipes, not moistened toilet paper).
2. Use topical creams: Hemorrhoidal creams (Anusol, preparation H ...) and Vaseline are effective in decreasing the irritation and the itching.
3. Sitz baths: Soaking the anal area in warm water for 15 minutes twice a day. There is no need to add any products to the water. Simple warm water is enough.
4. Increase fiber and water intake (see above).
5. Avoid straining (see above).
6. Exercise (see above).

What if the symptoms persist despite the above steps?

1. **Hemorrhoid banding:** The easiest to apply and most effective banding system is the CRH O'Regan system. This is an outpatient procedure, without the need for preparation (enemas or cleansing solutions are not needed), or sedation. It takes a few minutes to perform and the patient can return to work immediately. There are some restrictions following the application of the band as outlined in the Post-Banding instructions.
2. **Laser, infrared, or bipolar coagulation:** These methods involve the destruction of internal hemorrhoids through the application of laser or infrared light (photocautery) or electrocautery. Such procedures result in hardening (coagulation) and necrosis of excess hemorrhoidal tissue, with an associated formation of scar tissue (fibrosis) within the submucosal layer.
3. **Hemorrhoidectomy:** Hemorrhoidectomy involves the surgical removal (excision)

of excess tissue lining the anal canal (anoderm) and hemorrhoidal tissue. There are various techniques for the operative treatment of hemorrhoids. The specific surgical procedure performed depends upon a number of factors, including the specific circumstances of each case and the potential risks and benefits of such procedures. Patients for whom surgery has been recommended should share any questions with their physicians, surgeons, and other members of their healthcare team concerning optimal surgical approaches for their particular situation.

In most cases, such procedures require general or spinal anesthesia. With general anesthesia, loss of consciousness and sensation is induced by various injected and/or inhaled medications. With spinal anesthesia, a state of insensitivity to pain is produced by injection of an anesthetic drug into the space around the spinal cord.