

What Are Hemorrhoids?

The last inch or so of the colon (large intestine) is called the **anal canal**. The anal canal is lined with a network of small veins just under the skin. Certain activities, such as straining to push stool out (especially when constipated) or sitting for long periods of time, may cause these veins to enlarge. These enlarged veins create swollen pads of tissue, which we call hemorrhoids. Hard stool may further irritate hemorrhoids and push them out of the anal canal.

Types of Hemorrhoids?

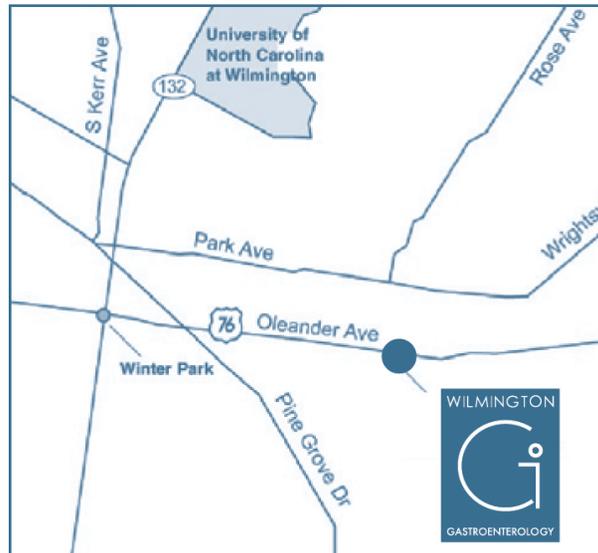
Two types of hemorrhoids may develop:

- **External hemorrhoids** look and feel like soft pads just outside the anus (rectal opening out of the body). They rarely cause pain until a blood clot forms inside them. Then they can cause sudden, severe pain.
- **Internal hemorrhoids** commonly occur in clusters around the anal canal wall. They may sometimes extend out of the anus. Usually painless, they may bleed or discharge mucus.

Other problems may cause symptoms similar to hemorrhoids. A **fissure** (a break in the skin) may be present in the anal canal and cause pain and bleeding.

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HEMORRHOIDS

Getting Relief



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A Painful Problem

Hemorrhoids, cushions of swollen veins in the anal canal, are often a source of embarrassment. They shouldn't be - they are a very common problem that affects all kinds of people, including those who sit for long periods, pregnant women, and many others. They can cause discomfort and even pain, but your doctor can help you find relief.

Hemorrhoid Symptoms

If you have hemorrhoids, you may notice one or more symptoms, including:

- Pain
- Itching
- Irritation
- Burning
- Bleeding

Causes of Hemorrhoids

Dry, hard-to-pass stool (constipation) is a major cause of hemorrhoids. Many women develop hemorrhoids during pregnancy. Sitting or standing for long period can also be a factor. Other causes include heavy lifting, lack of exercise, too much strenuous exercise, chronic cough, and poor bowel habits (such as straining to pass stool or sitting on the toilet for long periods of time).



Your Evaluation

Hemorrhoids usually aren't serious, but some of their symptoms are similar to symptoms of more serious diseases. Your doctor can evaluate you to confirm the presence of swollen hemorrhoids and rule out any other problem. This evaluation may include a medical history, physical exam, and possibly some tests.

Your History and Exam

Your doctor may ask you about your symptoms and how long you have had them. You may also be asked about your diet, bowel habits, activities, and any medications you take. Your doctor may perform a visual examination to look at your anal skin and digital rectal exam to feel for hemorrhoids in the anal canal. An **anoscopic exam** may also be done. During this exam, your doctor inserts a tube to view your lower anal canal.

Tests

To rule out other problems, additional tests may be done. Your doctor may test a sample of your stool for blood. You may have a **sigmoidoscopy** or **colonoscopy**. During these test, a lighted tube is used to examine your colon. Occasionally, a **barium enema**, a special text that provides an x-ray of your colon, may be done.

Treating Hemorrhoids

In many cases, your doctor can suggest a treatment plan that you can follow at home. The goals of this treatment are to help relieve your symptoms and ease constipation. In rare cases, surgery to remove a hemorrhoid may be necessary.

Relieving Your Symptoms

Here are some things you can try at home:

- Sitz Baths (sitting for a few minutes in about 3 inches of warm water)
- Nonprescription medications, such as pads, suppositories, and creams, can offer temporary relief of symptoms.
- Good bowel habits, such as sitting on the toilet only as long as necessary and avoiding straining, can help prevent irritation that leads to swelling.

Easing Constipation

To ease constipation, which is a common cause of hemorrhoids, eat more high-fiber foods and drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day. When combined with a proper diet, regular exercise can also help prevent constipation.

High Fiber Hints

The following foods can add fiber to your diet and help prevent problem hemorrhoids:

- High fiber cereals
- Bran and whole grains such as brown rice
- Vegetables (such as carrots, broccoli and peas)
- Fresh fruits (especially apples, pears, and dried fruits like raisins and apricots)
- Nuts and legumes (especially beans such as lentils, kidney beans and lima beans)

If necessary, your doctor may also recommend an over-the-counter fiber supplement.
