

Haemorrhoids (piles)

Information for patients

This information sheet explains what haemorrhoids (piles) are, some symptoms and the types of treatments that are available.

Confirming your identity

Before you have a treatment or procedure, our staff will ask you your **name and date of birth** and check your **ID band**. If you don't have an ID band we will also ask you to confirm your address.

If we don't ask these questions, then please ask us to check.
Ensuring your safety is our primary concern.

What are haemorrhoids?

Haemorrhoids (piles) are swellings that develop from the lining of the anus and lower rectum (back passage). Symptoms range from temporary and mild, to persistent and painful. In many cases, haemorrhoids are small and symptoms settle down without treatment. If required, treatment is usually effective. There are various treatment options.

What causes haemorrhoids?

There is a network of small veins (blood vessels) within the inside lining of the anus and lower rectum. These veins sometimes become wider and engorged with more blood than usual. These engorged veins and the overlying tissue may then form into one or more small swellings called haemorrhoids.

The exact reason why these changes occur and lead to haemorrhoids forming is not clear. Some haemorrhoids seem to develop for no apparent reason. However, it is thought that the pressure in and around the anus can be a major factor in many cases. If the pressure in and around the anus is increased, then it is thought that this can lead to haemorrhoids developing.

About half the people in the UK develop one or more haemorrhoids at some stage.

Certain situations increase the chance of haemorrhoids developing:

- Constipation. The pressure in and around the veins in the anus increases and is a common cause for haemorrhoids developing; this is exaggerated with straining on the toilet.
- Pregnancy. This is more likely due to the baby lying above the rectum and anus and causing pressure. Changes in hormones can also have an effect on the veins.
- Ageing. The tissues in the lining of the anus may become less supportive as we get older.

How are haemorrhoids diagnosed?

If at any time bleeding from the rectum or blood in the stool lasts more than few days, a thorough examination and diagnosis by a GP (home doctor) is important. Occasionally bleeding may also be symptoms of other digestive diseases including colorectal cancer.

What are the symptoms of haemorrhoids?

Internal haemorrhoids

These form in the back passage about 2 to 4cm above the rim (opening) of the anus. Their severity and size are classified into grades 1 to 4.

Symptoms

Small haemorrhoids are usually painless. The most common symptom is bleeding after going to the toilet. Larger haemorrhoids may cause a mucus discharge, some pain, irritation, and itch. The discharge may irritate the skin around the anus. You may have a sense of fullness in the anus, or a feeling of not fully emptying your rectum when you go to the toilet.

External haemorrhoid

This is less common than internal haemorrhoids. An external haemorrhoid is a small lump that develops on the outside edge of the anus. Many do not cause symptoms. However, if a blood clot forms in the haemorrhoid it can suddenly become very painful and need urgent treatment. A thrombosed external haemorrhoid may bleed a little for a few days. It then gradually shrinks to become a small skin-tag. Some people develop internal and external haemorrhoids at the same time.

You can reduce the chance of haemorrhoids by:

- Avoiding constipation and straining when opening your bowels
- Eating plenty of fibre, such as fruit, vegetables, cereals, wholemeal bread
- Drinking lots of fluid, aiming to drink at least two litres (10-12 cups) per day
- Avoiding painkillers that contain codeine, such as Co-codamol as these are common cause of constipation
- Applying ointments, creams, and suppositories

- Taking fibre supplements such as bran, or other fibre supplements ('bulking agents') such as ispaghula, methylcellulose, or sterculia. You can buy these at pharmacies or get them on prescription.

Treatment

- Banding is a treatment usually carried out in the outpatient clinic. Sometimes this can be undertaken at colonoscopy. A rubber band is placed at the base of the haemorrhoids. This cuts off the supply to the haemorrhoid, which then becomes an ulcer and drops off after a few days. This tissue at the base of the haemorrhoids heals with some scar tissue.
- Haemorrhoidectomy is the traditional operation under general anaesthetic. This procedure is chosen when haemorrhoids are too advanced for banding.

Sharing your information

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: 020 3299 3601

Email: kch-tr.pals@nhs.net

You can also contact us by using our online form at www.kch.nhs.uk/contact/pals

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND

Tel: 01689 863252

Email: kch-tr.palskent@nhs.net

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact PALS on 020 3299 1844.