What are hemorrhoids?
Hemorrhoids are swollen veins in the rectum or anus. **External hemorrhoids** affect the veins around the outside of the anus. They can be itchy and painful, and may crack and bleed. **Internal hemorrhoids** involve the veins inside your rectum. They usually don’t hurt, but they may bleed. Sometimes, an internal hemorrhoid may grow until it protrudes outside the anus, so that it becomes a **prolapsed** hemorrhoid. Both external and internal hemorrhoids can occur at the same time.

There are four types of internal hemorrhoids: first degree, which does not protrude from the anus; second degree, which protrudes during a bowel movement but then retracts; third degree, which protrudes during a bowel movement but can then be pushed back into place; and fourth degree, which always protrudes outside the anus. All four types of internal hemorrhoids can sometimes bleed.

What causes hemorrhoids?
Hemorrhoids are caused by excessive pressure on the pelvic and rectal veins; this allows blood to pool in the vessels, which then swell and stretch the surrounding tissues. One of the main culprits is straining during bowel movements. Pregnant women often develop hemorrhoids during the last 6 months of pregnancy because hormonal changes increase blood flow to the pelvis while relaxing supportive tissues, and the growing fetus also presses on the pelvic blood vessels. Obesity can also lead to excess pressure and hemorrhoids. Factors that can contribute to hemorrhoids include:
- Hurrying to complete a bowel movement
- Sitting on the toilet for prolonged periods of time and straining (do not read on the toilet!)
- Straining due to persistent constipation or diarrhea
- Obesity—especially in the abdomen and pelvis
- Pregnancy and labor
- Long-term heart and liver disease affecting the circulation
- Tumors in the pelvis (very rare).

Who is likely to get hemorrhoids?
Hemorrhoids affect almost everyone—men and women equally—but factors that may increase your risk include:
- Heredity (parents with hemorrhoids)
- Pregnancy
- Severe obesity
- Occupations that require standing for long periods
- Habitually lifting heavy objects
- White race.

What are the symptoms of hemorrhoids?
External hemorrhoids can cause itching, burning, irritation, and difficulty cleaning the anal area. You may notice bloody streaks on the toilet paper after straining to have a bowel movement. If a vein breaks inside an external hemorrhoid, the blood may pool under the skin and form a hard, painful lump; this is a clotted (thrombosed) hemorrhoid.

Internal hemorrhoids may cause painless rectal bleeding, leading to bloody streaks on the toilet paper or bright red blood in the toilet bowl after a normal bowel movement. Internal hemorrhoids can be painful if they protrude all the time and are squeezed by the anal muscles, or if they are thrombosed.

Is there anything I can do to help prevent hemorrhoids?
One of the best ways to prevent hemorrhoids is to prevent chronic constipation. To do this, get more fiber in your...
Hemorrhoids

Eat a healthy diet, including fresh fruits, leafy vegetables, and whole-grain breads and cereals. Drink lots of fluid—at least eight glasses of water per day—but avoid caffeinated beverages and alcohol, which can cause dehydration and constipation. Exercise regularly. Use only bulk-forming laxatives (CitruCel, FiberAll, Metamucil). Stimulant laxatives can lead to diarrhea, which can actually worsen hemorrhoids.

Cultivate healthy habits:
• Go to the bathroom whenever you have the urge rather than waiting.
• Avoid straining to pass stools; relax and give yourself time.
• Don’t hold your breath during a bowel movement.
• Avoid prolonged sitting or standing by taking frequent short walks.
• Avoid lifting heavy objects, and don’t hold your breath as you lift—exhale instead.
• If you’re pregnant, sleep on your side to reduce pressure on the pelvic blood vessels.

How are hemorrhoids diagnosed?
The diagnosis of hemorrhoids is based on your medical history and physical exam. This usually begins with a digital rectal exam, in which the doctor inserts a gloved finger into your rectum, or the doctor may use a short, lighted scope (anoscope). These are often the only tests you’ll need.

If the digital exam and anoscope don’t provide enough information, the doctor may use a flexible sigmoidoscope to look at your colon. In rare cases when the source of the rectal bleeding is still hidden, the next step may be a barium enema or colonoscopy to look higher in the digestive tract.

What can I do to treat hemorrhoids at home?
There are many things you can do to treat mild hemorrhoids at home, but don’t use commercial hemorrhoid wipes or medicines without consulting your doctor first. To relieve the pain:
• Clean your anus after every bowel movement by patting gently with moist toilet paper or moistened pads such as baby wipes.
• Avoid rubbing the anal area.
• Avoid soaps containing perfumes and dyes, which can be irritating.
• Sit in a warm soak (sitz bath) three or four times per day; fill your tub with just enough water to cover the anal area, and soak for 15 minutes—preferably right after a bowel movement.
• Use ice packs, alternating with warm compresses.
• Use acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Motrin) or aspirin, but limit the number of pills you take; drugs like aspirin and ibuprofen can sometimes make hemorrhoids bleed more.
• Increase your intake of water and dietary fiber.
• Take stool softeners and/or fiber laxatives.
• Avoid prolonged sitting or standing. Wear cotton underwear and loose clothing to prevent irritating moisture buildup.
• Do not use a ring (“doughnut”) cushion; this can restrict blood flow and make symptoms worse.
• Use an enema or stool softener if you have constipation.

How can I know if I have hemorrhoids?
Hemorrhoids are swollen veins in the rectum or anal area. They are often visible as a dark red or purple bump near the anus. This is called a thrombosed hemorrhoid. If you feel a lump in your anal area, it’s likely a hemorrhoid. It may feel like a small, firm, red bump. If this is your first hemorrhoid, it can usually be treated with self-care measures. If you have had hemorrhoids before, you may already know what they feel like.

What causes hemorrhoids?
Hemorrhoids can occur when the veins become inflamed, stretched, or enlarged. They are common in people who are overweight or pregnant, those who do a lot of sitting or standing, and those with certain medical conditions like liver disease or certain cancers. Hemorrhoids can also become more common with age.

What are the symptoms of hemorrhoids?
Symptoms of hemorrhoids include:
• Pain, burning, itching, or irritation around the anus.
• A bright red or purple bump near the anus.
• A feeling of something coming out of your rectum.
• Blood when you have a bowel movement.

Do hemorrhoids go away on their own?
Most hemorrhoids go away on their own. However, if they don’t resolve or if they cause continued discomfort, your doctor may recommend treatment.

What is the treatment for hemorrhoids?
There are many treatment options for hemorrhoids, ranging from over-the-counter remedies to medical procedures.

• Sitz baths: Taking a warm bath can help reduce inflammation and pain.
• Ice packs: Applying ice packs to the anal area can help reduce pain and swelling.
• Stool softeners: These softeners can help make stools easier to pass, reducing the risk of hemorrhoids.
• Fiber: Increasing your fiber intake can help prevent constipation and hemorrhoids.
• Medications: Over-the-counter medications like hydrocortisone cream can help reduce inflammation and pain.

Do hemorrhoids need surgery?
Sometimes hemorrhoids need medical treatment. Surgery may be necessary if:
• Hemorrhoids are causing severe pain or discomfort.
• Hemorrhoids are recurring.
• Hemorrhoids are causing other symptoms, like bleeding.

Surgery for hemorrhoids can include:
• Rubber band ligation: A small band is placed on the hemorrhoid, which cuts off the blood supply and causes it to shrivel up.
• Injection sclerotherapy: A chemical is injected into the hemorrhoid, which causes it to shrink.
• Hemorrhoidectomy: The hemorrhoid is removed surgically.

What are the risks of hemorrhoid surgery?
Surgery for hemorrhoids can carry some risks, including:
• Infection
• Bleeding
• Pain
• Scarring

What can I do to prevent hemorrhoids?
Preventing hemorrhoids involves maintaining a healthy lifestyle and taking steps to avoid constipation.

• Eat a high-fiber diet, including plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
• Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.
• Exercise regularly, especially activities like walking.
• Avoid straining during bowel movements.
• Use a sitz bath to help reduce pain and swelling.
• Use stool softeners or fiber supplements, if needed.