



Haemorrhoids (Piles)

You have been given this leaflet because you have asked for haemorrhoids treatment that you can get “over the counter” (OTC) from pharmacies, supermarkets and some other shops. After a local and national public consultation on OTC medicines, we do not prescribe simple haemorrhoids treatment anymore.

Haemorrhoids, also known as piles, are swellings containing enlarged blood vessels found inside or around the bottom (the rectum and anus). In many cases, haemorrhoids don't cause symptoms and some people don't even realise they have them. But when symptoms do occur, they may include:

- Bleeding after passing a stool – the blood is usually bright red
- Itchy bottom
- A lump hanging outside of the anus, which may need to be pushed back in after passing a stool
- A mucus discharge after passing a stool
- Soreness, redness and swelling around your anus

What are the common causes?

Many cases are thought to be caused by too much straining on the toilet as a result of prolonged constipation. This is often caused by a lack of fibre in a person's diet. Long-term diarrhoea can also make you more vulnerable to developing haemorrhoids. Haemorrhoids are also more common with increased age, obesity, pregnancy, sitting down for long periods of time, regularly lifting heavy objects or a persistent cough.

Suggested lifestyle changes

Haemorrhoid symptoms often settle down after a few days without needing treatment.

Making lifestyle changes to reduce the strain on the blood vessels in and around your anus is often recommended. These can include:

- Gradually increasing the amount of fibre in your diet – good sources of fibre include fruit, vegetables, wholegrain rice, whole-wheat pasta and bread, pulses and beans, seeds, nuts and oats.
- Drinking plenty of fluid – particularly water, but avoiding or cutting down on caffeine and alcohol.
- Not delaying going to the toilet – ignoring the urge to empty your bowels can make your stools harder and drier, which can lead to straining when you do go to the toilet.
- Avoiding medication that causes constipation – such as painkillers that contain codeine.
- Losing weight if you're overweight.
- Exercising regularly.

How do I treat?

If the tips above haven't improved your symptoms you may wish to try medication.

Creams, ointments and suppositories, which you insert into your bottom, are available from pharmacies or supermarkets. They can be used to relieve swelling and discomfort.

- **Rub on relief** - Over-the-counter wipes or creams can soothe pain and itch with no side effects. Don't use one with hydrocortisone for more than a week.
- **Ice** - Put a small cold pack on the trouble spot several times a day to help reduce swelling.
- **Consider painkillers** - paracetamol or ibuprofen, available OTC could help with soreness.
- **Don't scratch** - You could damage the skin and make the irritation and the itching worse.
- **Choose cotton** - Wear loose, soft underwear which keeps the area aired out and stops moisture from building up, which can bother your haemorrhoids.
- **Speak to your pharmacist** - for advice if you're not sure which type of medicine is best for you and your symptoms.

When should I seek advice?

- If you have persistent or severe symptoms of haemorrhoids
- If your symptoms don't get better or you experience pain or bleeding

For more information

- Visit your local pharmacy for advice

Be self-care aware

Find out more about self-care at www.nhs.uk