

Focus on Colorectal Health: Hemorrhoids

Each year, more than 1 million Americans suffer from hemorrhoid disease, and more than half the population will develop hemorrhoids in their lifetime. Unfortunately, many people suffer in silence, rather than discussing hemorrhoid treatment with their doctor.

What Are Hemorrhoids?

Hemorrhoids are blood vessels found in the anal canal at the end of the rectum. Hemorrhoidal tissue is normal and is found in all individuals. Hemorrhoids cause problems when they become enlarged and produce symptoms.

External hemorrhoids are located in the anal canal's lower portion near the anal opening and are covered by very sensitive skin. Clotting, or thrombosis, caused by pooling of blood is the most common complication. A thrombosed external hemorrhoid is a hard lump, which can rupture and bleed. Symptoms include pain, itching or burning in the anal area.

Internal hemorrhoids are found in the upper portion of the anal canal where it joins the rectum. The most common symptoms are bleeding and protrusion during bowel movements. Internal hemorrhoids are usually painless but can cause significant pain if they become prolapsed and protrude out of the anal canal.

Increased pressure in hemorrhoidal tissue contributes to the development of hemorrhoid symptoms. Some common causes are:

- Straining to have a bowel movement

- Having frequent bowel movements
- Sitting for long periods of time on the toilet
- Being pregnant and giving birth
- Lifting heavy weight
- Coughing or vomiting frequently

How Are Hemorrhoids Treated?

Mild symptoms can usually be treated by:

- Eating a high-fiber diet
- Drinking plenty of fluids to help soften bowel movements
- Soaking in warm water two to three times a day for 15 minutes
- Taking medications prescribed by your doctor that help relieve swelling and discomfort

Hemorrhoids that don't respond to the above treatment can be treated with a number of other options:

In-office removal. A thrombosed external hemorrhoid usually causes significant pain. Many times, the doctor can remove the hemorrhoid in the office through a small incision using local anesthesia.

Rubber band ligation. This is a common office procedure to treat internal hemorrhoids that protrude during bowel movements. The doctor places a small rubber band around the hemorrhoid, which cuts off its blood supply. The hemorrhoid dies and falls off after several days. This procedure may cause bleeding when the hemorrhoid falls off and also some mild discomfort.

Injection sclerotherapy. To treat bleeding hemorrhoids that don't protrude, a chemical is injected into the hemorrhoid, causing it to shrivel up. The procedure is painless.

Unfortunately, many people suffer in silence, rather than discussing hemorrhoid treatment with their doctor.



Hemorrhoidectomy. During this procedure, the surgeon removes hemorrhoids that do not respond to or are too large for office treatments or prolapsed hemorrhoids that can't be pushed back inside. Hemorrhoidectomy is an outpatient procedure performed under general, spinal or epidural anesthesia. After surgery, the patient will need to rest for a period of time. The doctor will prescribe medications to soften bowel movements and relieve pain. Warm soaks are also recommended. Hemorrhoidectomy is the best method for the permanent relief of symptomatic hemorrhoids because the recurrence rate is very low after surgery.

Procedure for prolapse and hemorrhoids (PPH).

This innovative, minimally invasive procedure was first introduced in the United States in 2001. PPH is a surgical technique that reduces hemorrhoidal tissue prolapse. Using a circular stapling device, the procedure repositions the tissue lining the anal canal and reduces blood flow to internal hemorrhoids. The hemorrhoids then shrink within four to six weeks after the procedure. This operation results in less pain than traditional procedures. Some patients who require hemorrhoid removal are candidates for this procedure.

Why Seeing a Colon and Rectal Surgeon Is Important

Hemorrhoid symptoms, such as rectal bleeding, are similar to more serious diseases like colon cancer and should be evaluated by a colon and rectal surgeon so appropriate treatment can begin. Colon and rectal surgeons are experienced in all treatment options for hemorrhoid disease. Different hemorrhoids, patients and symptoms require different treatments. A colon and rectal surgeon is best able to choose the correct course of treatment.

We're Here to Help

For a complete list of colon and rectal surgeons on Northside's medical staff, visit www.northside.com, click on the Find a Doctor section and select the Colon and Rectal Surgery specialty. Or you can call our free physician referral service at (404) 851-8817.