

## PATIENT INFORMATION

### HEMORRHOIDS

#### **WHAT ARE HEMORRHOIDS?**

Hemorrhoids are swollen but normally present blood vessels in and around the anus and lower rectum that stretch under pressure, similar to varicose veins in the legs. They are caused by increased pressure and swelling in the rectal area that may result from straining to move the bowel. Other contributing factors include pregnancy, heredity, aging, and chronic constipation or diarrhea.

#### ***WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HEMORRHOIDS?***

Although many people have hemorrhoids, not all experience symptoms. The most common symptom of internal hemorrhoids is bright red blood covering the stool, on toilet paper, or in the toilet bowl. However, an internal hemorrhoid may protrude through the anus outside the body, becoming irritated and painful, especially during a bowel movement. Occasionally, symptoms of external hemorrhoids may include painful swelling or a hard lump around the anus that results when a blood clot forms within the hemorrhoid, known as thrombosed hemorrhoid.

#### ***HOW COMMON ARE HEMORRHOIDS?***

Hemorrhoids are very common. About half the population have hemorrhoids by the age 50. Hemorrhoids are also common among pregnant women. Hemorrhoids usually are not dangerous or life threatening. In most cases, hemorrhoidal symptoms will go away within a few days.

#### ***HOW ARE HEMORRHOIDS DIAGNOSED?***

A thorough evaluation and proper diagnosis by the doctor is important any time bleeding from the rectum or blood in the stool lasts more than a couple of days. Occasionally, bleeding may also be a symptom of other digestive diseases, including colorectal cancer.

The doctor will examine the anus and rectum to look for swollen blood vessels that indicate hemorrhoids and will also perform a digital rectal exam to feel for abnormalities.

#### **WHAT IS THE TREATMENT OF HEMORRHOIDS?**

Medical treatment of hemorrhoids initially is aimed at relieving symptoms. Measures to reduce symptoms include:

- Warm tub (or sitz) baths several times a day in plain, warm water for about 10 minutes, especially after a bowel movement.
- Ice packs to help reduce swelling.
- Application of a hemorrhoidal cream or suppository to the affected area for a limited time. (e.g. Anusol-HC)
- Stool softeners or Fiber supplements (e.g. Colace, Senekot, Metamucil, etc.)

In some cases, hemorrhoids may be treated surgically. These methods are used to shrink and destroy the hemorrhoidal tissue and are performed under anesthesia. The doctor will perform the surgery during an office visit or hospital visit.

A number of surgical methods may be used to remove or reduce the size of internal hemorrhoids. These techniques include:

- Rubber band ligation – A rubber band is placed around the base of the hemorrhoid inside the rectum. The band cuts off circulation, and the hemorrhoid withers away within a few days.
- Sclerotherapy – A chemical solution is injected around the blood vessel to shrink the hemorrhoid.
- Electrical or laser heat or infrared light – Both techniques use special devices to burn hemorrhoidal tissue.
- Hemorrhoidectomy – Occasionally, extensive or severe internal or external hemorrhoids may require removal by surgery known as hemorrhoidectomy. This is the best method for permanent removal of hemorrhoids.

### **HOW ARE HEMORRHOIDS PREVENTED?**

Prevention of the recurrence of hemorrhoids is aimed at changing conditions associated with the pressure and straining of constipation. Doctors will often recommend increasing fiber and fluids in the diet. Eating the right amount of fiber and drinking six to eight glasses of fluid (not alcohol) result in softer, bulkier stools. A softer stool makes emptying the bowels easier and lessens the pressure on hemorrhoids caused by straining. Eliminating straining also helps prevent the hemorrhoids from protruding.