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## SELF-CARE INFORMATION ON PILES

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Piles (Haemorrhoids) are swellings that develop from the lining of the anus and lower rectum. Symptoms range from temporary and mild to persistent and uncomfortable. In many cases, haemorrhoids are small, and symptoms settle down without treatment. If required, treatment is usually effective. Various treatment options are detailed below.

### What are haemorrhoids and what causes them?

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Haemorrhoids are swellings that can occur in the anus and lower rectum. About half of people in the UK develop one or more haemorrhoids at some stage. Veins within the inside lining of the anus and rectum sometimes become wider and engorged with more blood than usual, forming small swellings called haemorrhoids.

The exact reason why these changes occur is not always clear. However, pressure or straining in and around the anus is considered a major factor.

### Factors that increase the chance of developing haemorrhoids:

- **Constipation and straining** at the toilet can lead to haemorrhoids.
- **Pregnancy** is a common cause, likely due to increased pressure from the baby and hormonal changes.
- **Ageing** may lead to weakening tissues in the anal lining.
- **Hereditary factors** may play a role in vein wall weakness in the anal region.
- **Prolonged sitting or sedentary behaviour** can contribute to haemorrhoid formation and worsening symptoms.

## What are the symptoms of haemorrhoids?

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### **Internal haemorrhoids**

These develop in the back passage about 2 to 4 cm above the anus opening and are classified by severity:

- **Grade 1:** Small swellings on the inside lining, not visible or felt externally.
- **Grade 2:** Larger, may prolapse when using the toilet but retract spontaneously.
- **Grade 3:** Prolapse externally and require manual repositioning.
- **Grade 4:** Permanently prolapsed and cannot be pushed back in, sometimes large and uncomfortable.



Grade 1

Grade 2

Grade 3

Grade 4

While smaller haemorrhoids are often painless, common symptoms include:

- **Bleeding after using the toilet** (bright red blood on toilet paper or in the toilet bowl)
- **Mucous discharge**
- **Pain, irritation, or itching** around the anus
- **A feeling of fullness** or incomplete emptying of the bowel
- **Thrombosed haemorrhoids** (a clot forming inside a haemorrhoid) can cause significant pain

### **External haemorrhoids (Perianal haematoma)**

Less common than internal haemorrhoids, these are small lumps on the outer edge of the anus. They may not cause symptoms, but if a blood clot forms, they can become suddenly **very painful** and require urgent treatment. The pain usually peaks within 48-72 hours and gradually improves over **7-10 days**. A thrombosed external haemorrhoid may bleed slightly for a few days before shrinking into a small skin tag.

## How to manage and treat haemorrhoids

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### **1. Prevent constipation and straining**

To keep stools soft and avoid excessive straining:

- **Eat plenty of fibre:** Include fruits, vegetables, cereals, wholemeal bread, and other high-fibre foods.
- **Drink plenty of fluids:** Aim for *at least 2 litres (10-12 cups) per day*; avoid excessive alcohol, as it can be dehydrating.

- **Use fibre supplements:** If dietary fibre is insufficient, consider bulking agents such as *ispaghula*, *methylcellulose*, *bran*, or *sterculia* (available at pharmacies). Methylcellulose also helps soften stools.
- **Avoid painkillers containing codeine or other opiates**, as they can cause constipation.
- **Go to the toilet as soon as you feel the need:** Delaying can lead to harder stools that are more difficult to pass.
- **Avoid prolonged toilet sitting:** Do not strain or spend too long on the toilet (e.g., avoid reading while sitting).
- **Stay physically active:** Regular exercise helps maintain healthy bowel movements.

These measures often help relieve **bleeding and discomfort** and may be sufficient to treat small, non-prolapsing haemorrhoids (Grade 1), which often resolve over time.

## 2. Topical treatments (Ointments, creams, and suppositories)

Various over-the-counter treatments can ease symptoms such as discomfort and itching. Consult a pharmacist for guidance.

- **Bland soothing creams, ointments, or suppositories** may help.
- **Anaesthetic-containing preparations** provide pain relief but should be used for short periods (5-7 days) to avoid skin sensitivity or irritation.
- **Steroid-containing preparations** may be recommended for severe inflammation, but prolonged use (beyond 1-2 weeks) should be avoided.
- **For very painful thrombosed haemorrhoids, topical glyceryl trinitrate (GTN) ointment** may help reduce pain and promote healing—ask your GP or pharmacist about this option.
- **Haemorrhoids during pregnancy** typically resolve after childbirth and can be managed with the above measures.

## 3. Banding treatment

Banding is a common **outpatient** procedure for **Grade 2 and 3** haemorrhoids, and sometimes for persistent Grade 1 haemorrhoids that do not respond to other treatments.

- A **rubber band** is placed at the base of the haemorrhoid to cut off blood supply, causing it to drop off within a few days.
- **Usually painless** and effective, but recurrence is possible if constipation and straining are not addressed.

## 4. Other treatment options

If symptoms persist despite lifestyle changes and banding, a GP may refer you to a specialist. Surgery is considered only for **severe, persistent cases**. Options include:

- **Injection sclerotherapy:** A chemical (phenol oil) is injected to scar the haemorrhoid tissue, causing it to shrink and fall off.
- **Haemorrhoidectomy:** Used for large haemorrhoids but can have a painful recovery period.
- **Haemorrhoidal artery ligation:** Ties off small arteries supplying haemorrhoids, leading to shrinkage. This method is usually not painful.

## When to seek medical advice

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### ***See your GP if:***

- Symptoms persist despite self-care measures for ***more than 3 weeks***.
- You experience ***frequent bleeding***.
- You develop ***severe pain or swelling***.
- You notice a ***lump*** that does not go away.

### ***Seek urgent medical attention if:***

- There is excessive ***bleeding*** or ***blood in stools***.
- You experience ***severe pain with swelling*** (possible thrombosed haemorrhoid).
- There is ***significant anal swelling or difficulty passing stools***.

For ***urgent*** medical advice, call ***111*** (available 24/7). In an ***emergency***, call ***999***.

## Useful information and contacts

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- **Ask your pharmacist** for advice on treatment options.
- **NHS Choices** - [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)
- **Patient UK** - [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)
- **Bowel Research UK** - <https://www.bowelresearchuk.org>

### ***If you have further questions:***

- Fill out a ***triage form on our website*** or call the practice on 01285 653184 or 01285 653122
- ***For urgent medical advice***, call ***111*** (24 hours)
- ***In an emergency***, call ***999***