How to Prevent Hemorrhoids While Managing IBS

by EMMI SCOTT

The Connection Between Hemorrhoids and IBS

Unfortunately, hemorrhoids and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) can go hand in hand. This is because many of IBS' most common symptoms are the main causes of hemorrhoids. Fortunately, many of the things you can do to manage IBS are the same things that will help you avoid hemorrhoids. If you already have hemorrhoids, there are some simple actions you can take to decrease your discomfort and help them go away.

What Are Hemorrhoids?

Hemorrhoids are swollen veins in the lower part of the anus and rectum. They are also known as piles. Hemorrhoids are extremely common. Nearly 75% of adults will get them at some point.

Hemorrhoid Symptoms

You will likely notice different symptoms depending on whether you have internal or external hemorrhoids. External hemorrhoids develop under the skin around the anus. Internal hemorrhoids occur inside the rectum.

If you have external hemorrhoids, you may notice irritation or itching around your anus, swelling around the anus, pain and discomfort and bleeding. If you have internal hemorrhoids, you probably won't be able to see or feel them, and they usually don't cause pain. However, you might notice blood in your stool or on the toilet paper after you pass a bowel movement. A prolapsed or protruding hemorrhoid can also push through the opening of the anus. This will cause irritation and pain.

Hemorrhoid Causes

Hemorrhoids are caused by increased pressure in the lower rectum. This can happen due to sitting on the toilet for long periods of time or straining during bowel movements. Chronic constipation and diarrhea can also lead to hemorrhoids. Also, both pregnancy and obesity increase pressure on the lower rectum and can cause hemorrhoids.

Why Do People With IBS Get Hemorrhoids?

People with IBS have chronic constipation or diarrhea and sometimes both. This condition can lead to increased time on the toilet. People may also strain over the toilet when they are experiencing constipation or have only partially passed a bowel movement, which is common in people with IBS.

How to Address Hemorrhoids

If you notice external hemorrhoids and don't see improvement over the course of a week, see your doctor. You should also make an appointment with your doctor if you spot blood after a bowel movement. Hemorrhoids might

not be the source of rectal bleeding. It is important to see your doctor to rule out colorectal or anal cancer as the cause.

Your doctor may suggest a topical cream or ointment to apply to the hemorrhoids for a short period of time. Most of these are available over the counter. Witch hazel pads can also offer relief.

Soaking in a warm bath two to three times per day for 10 to 15 minutes can alleviate hemorrhoid-related discomfort. If you don't have access to a bathtub or have difficulty getting in and out of the tub, a sitz bath could be helpful. A sitz bath is a basin that sits over the toilet. Fill it with plain warm water and soak your anal area just as you would in the bathtub.

If your hemorrhoids make you uncomfortable, you can take an oral pain reliever. Aspirin, ibuprofen and acetaminophen can all help relieve your discomfort temporarily.

Finally, slowly increase the amount of fiber you eat each day through whole grains, fruits and vegetables. Fiber increases the bulk of stool and softens it, which makes it easier to pass. This will help you avoid straining while on the toilet, which can make the hemorrhoids you already have worse. Increasing fiber intake too quickly can cause gas, so add it slowly and intentionally.

Avoiding Hemorrhoids

Whether you have already had hemorrhoids and don't want them again, or you have IBS and want to prevent hemorrhoids, there are several things you can do to avoid getting them.

- **Go to the bathroom as soon as you feel like you need to.** If you wait to pass a bowel movement, you might lose the urge to go. The stool can dry out and be harder to pass later on, which might lead to straining on the toilet.
- **Don't strain on the toilet.** While it can be frustrating and uncomfortable to not be able to pass stool, avoid holding your breath and straining. This places increased pressure on the lower rectum.
- **Don't sit for too long.** Whether you are on the toilet or in a chair, long periods of sitting also places pressure on the anus and can lead to hemorrhoids. If you have to sit for long periods at work, try placing your computer on top of a box or crate so you can stand for parts of the day.
- **Increase dietary fiber and consider taking a fiber supplement.** If you are not getting between 20 grams to 30 grams of fiber in your diet per day, a fiber supplement may help you get the amount you need. Both psyllium and methylcellulose have been shown to improve hemorrhoid symptoms.
- **Stay hydrated.** Drink six to eight glasses of water every day to soften stools and make them easier to pass. If you are taking a fiber supplement, drink eight or more glasses of water each day. If you don't, the fiber supplement can actually make constipation worse.
- **Exercise regularly.** Exercising can prevent many of the causes of hemorrhoids. It prevents constipation and reduces pressure on the veins that become swollen from sitting for too long. It can also help to lose weight that might be increasing the pressure on the veins in the anus.

While developing hemorrhoids is not ideal, in most cases, they can be treated with over-the-counter medications. Many of the measures you can take to prevent hemorrhoids, such as exercising, staying hydrated and increasing fiber intake, will also help you manage IBS and feel better in general.