Hemorrhoid prevention? [1]

Dear Alice,

I have been diagnosed with hemorrhoids. I know what causes them, but my question is: how can I prevent them?

? Itchy painful crack

Answer

Dear Itchy painful crack,

The best way to prevent the booty blues caused by hemorrhoids is to first understand what they are and what causes them. Hemorrhoids are enlarged veins in the lower rectum and anus that result from excessive pressure in the surrounding tissue. Sometimes hemorrhoids occur outside the anus and may be visible, while for others they occur inside the rectum and are invisible to the naked eye.

As constipation is a frequent cause of rectal problems like hemorrhoids, a diet high in fiber may help prevent them from forming or flaring up since it adds bulk and moisture to the stool. To get the pipes flowing more smoothly, consider adding foods to your diet that are rich in fiber including:

- Whole grain breads and cereals
- Beans
- Fresh or lightly cooked fruits and vegetables
- Brown rice and other grains
- Nuts and seeds

You may also want to try adding bran (available in most grocery stores) to your food or use a daily fiber supplement for an extra boost. If you have not been eating a high fiber diet, be sure to increase your dietary fiber slowly and don't go overboard. Sudden increases in fiber may cause diarrhea, bloating, and intestinal gas which may just make your hemorrhoids feel worse. Also try avoiding highly refined foods like cream of wheat, white rice, white bread, pastries, cakes, pies, and macaroni products, or foods that don't "sit well" with your digestive system. Staying hydrated by drinking six to eight glasses of fluid each day and limiting alcohol may also help avoid small, dry stools that may lead to derriere discomfort.

In addition to constipation, hemorrhoids may be caused by straining when you poop, or sitting
for a long period of time. Putting off the urge to go, using laxatives or enemas, or spending too much time on the porcelain throne may aggravate symptoms. Though many people think that they must have a bowel movement every day, this is not necessary. In fact, bowel movements may occur from once a week up to several times a day, and still be normal. The trick is to go when you feel the urge and avoid pushing or straining. Holding stool in the bowel causes it to become hard, dry, and difficult to eliminate.

Regular exercise may also help prevent constipation and pressure on the veins that lead to hemorrhoids. If you are overweight or obese, talk to your health care provider about developing strategies to lose weight, as extra pounds may be contributing to your hemorrhoids. Finally, avoid heavy lifting because it puts pressure on the anal opening and may play a role in hemorrhoid formation. Keep in touch with your health care provider about the progression of your hemorrhoids, better and worse, since they may be able to give you additional tips or offer some extra help.

As with many conditions, healthy eating habits and regular exercise may go a long way. With a little effort to keep your insides running smoothly, you may be able to stave off the booty blues.

Alice!
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