



Common Rectal Problems

Hemorrhoids are swollen or varicose veins in the anal-rectal area. They also can be called varicose veins. They are caused by pressure in the rectal veins from standing upright, sitting for long periods, and by poor bowel habits such as constipation, diarrhea, and straining at stool. Other factors include pregnancy, obesity, and coughing or sneezing.

Anal fissures are cracks or a split in the skin of the anal canal. They usually are caused by the passage of a hard stool, an explosive bowel movement, or infections.

Pruritis ani (rectal itching) often accompanies the pain of hemorrhoids and fissures from inflammation of the anus. It also can be the result of poor hygiene, parasitic infections such as pinworms, yeast infections, irritated large bowel, or excess irritating foods such as coffee, cola, chocolate, beer, and tomatoes.

Bleeding from the rectum is often caused by hemorrhoids or anal fissures. Other more serious causes are colitis, polyps, or cancerous and noncancerous tumors.

Treatment:

Treatment for rectal disorders begins with soaking in a hot bath ten to fifteen minutes to relieve pain and itching. General and special good hygiene by keeping clean and dry around the anal area can be helpful. Use soft paper without dyes and perfumes when wiping after a bowel movement. Soaps and scrubbing can be irritating, especially Ivory soap. A diet of fiber to treat constipation is the most important part of cure and prevention.

Constipation:

Constipation is the most common cause of uncomplicated rectal disorders. It is the passage of hard, dry stools and excessive staining during a bowel movement.

The Large Intestine:

The function of the large intestine, also known as the large bowel or colon, is to absorb water from the fecal waste and pass the waste to the rectum, where it is stored until it is expelled. By the time fecal material reaches the rectum, most of the water is gone and the stool is fairly solid. If the fecal mass lacks bulk from fibrous foods, it can move too slowly through the colon. Too much water is absorbed by the colon and the stool becomes too hard and dry. If the material passes through the colon too quickly, loose, watery stools or diarrhea result.

Preventive treatment begins with a diet that keeps the stool soft, bulky, and easy to pass. Foods with a high content of fiber retain water, increase bulk, and lubricate the fecal mass. Without necessary bulk, the colon may not be able to push the waste material through properly. Foods high in fiber are raw or whole fruits and vegetables; including skin and pulp, whole grain cereals, whole grain bread, and bran.

Good Health Habits:

Regular bowel habits are learned by becoming sensitive to the “urge” for a bowel movement promptly. Consistent delay causes a desensitization of the “urge” signal, which eventually causes stretching of the lower rectal pouch to retain larger masses. Bowel habits can be learned by taking an early morning cup of coffee or tea into the bathroom, shutting the door, and relaxing a few minutes whether you have a bowel movement or not. Avoid straining. Excessive straining can cause irritation and hemorrhoids.

Other helpful hints include drinking plenty of fluids, water, juice, tea, etc. Eat regularly and chew your food thoroughly. Exercise daily with brisk walks or other physical activity.

Be aware of any significant changes in bowel habits like diarrhea, constipation, or black, tarry stools, blood or bleeding. Report these to your medical practitioner.

Laxatives:

Chemical laxatives tend to stimulate the bowel by causing an irritated lining. This treatment will never help in achieving normal bowel function and can make the bowel dependent on chemical action. A bulk-producing laxative will not cause immediate evacuation but works to form a soft bulk of fiber for normal function. Examples of bulk producing laxatives are Metamucil and Effersyllium (Psyllium seed preparation) and can be purchased at health or drug stores. Three tablespoons a day of plain whole bran will provide bulk effect. Mix the bran with cereal, sprinkle it on toast, or add it to smoothies, casseroles, etc. Remember to drink extra fluids.

Dietary Fiber:

Dietary fiber is the part of plant food – vegetables and grains – that is not broken down by digestive juices in the intestine, thus producing bulk. It is important because it “holds” water in the intestine and softens stools, regulating the time it takes for food wastes to move through the body. Consult the back of this pamphlet for lists of foods that help or hinder healthy elimination.

	Helpful Foods	Constipating Foods
Beverages	Fruit juices Water (8 glasses daily) Milk	Coffee Alcohol Buttermilk
Breads & Cereals	Bran muffins Whole grain breads Whole grain cereals	White bread White crackers Pastries Spaghetti Macaroni Noodles White rice
Desserts	Custards Pudding	Ice cream Anything with refined sugar
Fruits	Most raw fruit	Green grapes Bananas
Vegetables	All colored vegetables	Corn Turnips Potatoes Potato chips Rutabagas
Dairy Products		Sour cream Yogurt

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