What Are Piles?

Piles, one of the most common ailments known in both men and women, affect more than half of the population at some point in their lives. Onset commonly occurs after the age of 30, but piles are reported in people of all ages.

Piles are swollen veins. Each of us has veins around the anus that tend to stretch under pressure, somewhat like varicose veins in the legs. It is believed that these veins exist to protect and cushion the anal canal. When these veins swell, they are called “piles”. One set of veins is inside the rectum (internal piles) and another is under the skin around the anus (external piles).

Internal Piles

Internal piles usually are not painful, but they may bleed. Sometimes, internal piles may stretch until a bulge forms outside the anus. This is called a “prolapse”.

A prolapse may go back inside the rectum on its own, or it may be gently pushed back inside. If the prolapsed piles cannot be pushed back inside, consultation with a physician about surgical treatment options may be necessary.

External Piles

External piles involve the veins outside the anus. They can be itchy or painful, and can sometimes crack and bleed. If a blood clot forms, one may feel a tender lump on the edge of the anus and see bright red blood on toilet paper or in the toilet after a bowel movement.

Symptoms of piles, both external and internal, include aching after a bowel movement, anal or rectal itching, bright red blood on toilet tissue or in the toilet bowl, and the appearance of anal tissue pads or sensitive lumps. When any of these symptoms are present, it is important to see a doctor to make sure the cause of the discomfort is piles and not some other problem.

Constipation is the main cause of piles. A person may also be more likely to get piles as they age or if their parents had them. Pregnant women often get piles because of the strain from carrying the baby and from giving birth. For most women, such piles are a temporary problem. Being overweight, straining to move your bowels, sitting too long on the toilet, or standing or lifting too much can make piles worse.

Some Tips for Preventing Piles

Please speak to your GP before making any changes to your diet and exercise routine. Your GP may recommend some of the following:

- Include more fibre in your diet. Fresh fruits, leafy vegetables, and whole-grain breads and cereals are good sources of fibre.
- Drink plenty of fluids (except alcohol). Eight glasses of water (around 1.2 litres) each day is ideal.
- Do not read on the toilet. Sitting and straining too long encourages swelling.
- Exercise regularly.
What Are Piles?

- Avoid laxatives, except the bulk-forming kind. Other types of laxatives can lead to diarrhoea, which can worsen piles.
- When you feel the need to have a bowel movement, don’t wait for long periods before using the bathroom.

Some Tips for Reducing Discomfort from Piles

Please speak to your GP about how best to reduce your own discomfort. Your GP may recommend some of the following:

- Take a warm bath three to four times a day.
- Clean after each bowel movement by patting gently with moist toilet paper or moistened pads, such as baby wipes.
- Use ice packs to relieve swelling.

Treatment of Piles

Although anorectal conditions are benign and easily treated, patients may delay seeking medical advice because of embarrassment or fear of cancer. As a result, many patients first see a physician when the problem has advanced, requiring extensive treatment and causing greater patient distress than if the conditions had been adequately diagnosed and managed at an earlier stage.

Often lifestyle changes, topical medications, and good hygiene are all that is needed to reduce the symptoms of piles. Most painful piles stop hurting on their own in one to two weeks. If the pain persists, it may be time to talk to a physician about other treatment options.

Disclaimer:

Please note we are not in a position to diagnose or prescribe for specific medical conditions on our Helpline. Should you have any queries relating to your particular condition we recommend that you consult your GP.

---


