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HAEMORRHOIDS - WHAT ARE THEY?

Haemorrhoids are considered to be **internal** or **external**.

Internal haemorrhoids are collections of blood vessels which form into "3 cushions" in varying positions around the anal canal.

External haemorrhoids are really small skin tags which protrude from the anal verge.

SYMPTOMS

The commonest symptom of haemorrhoids is bright bleeding during and after a bowel motion. Internal haemorrhoids may also prolapse (protrude) and cause some degree of discomfort and irritation. External haemorrhoids may make cleaning the anal area difficult and also act as a source of irritation. Occasionally a blood vessel may burst under the skin and cause a painful and swelling which is referred to as a **thrombosed external haemorrhoid** or **perianal haematoma**. This latter condition is common in athletes or individuals who may strain excessively at stool. It is a self limiting condition, but may often be improved by a minor procedure which can be undertaken in the office.

Thrombosed prolapsed haemorrhoids refer to the complications of internal haemorrhoids which may tend to protrude from the anus after a bowel motion and not return to the lower part of the bowel. This painful and distressing condition sometimes requires semi-urgent operation.

TREATMENT

The treatment of haemorrhoids depends on their severity. Symptoms from haemorrhoids may improve by an increased amount of fibre in the diet. Ointments and suppositories may also be helpful. Large haemorrhoids may require some injection treatment or the use of elastic bands, and very large haemorrhoids may require haemorrhoidectomy. Freezing, infra-red and laser therapy to haemorrhoids are just differing methods of using energy to remove a haemorrhoid. They have no particular advantage over "normal" haemorrhoidectomy.