

# Haemorrhoids During Pregnancy: Symptoms, Causes, Treatment, and Prevention



## Highlights

Haemorrhoids are swollen varicose veins in the rectum and anus.

Around 1 in 3 pregnancies are affected by haemorrhoids.

Symptoms include bleeding, pain, or burning during bowel movements.

Haemorrhoids can be treated and prevented by managing constipation, staying hydrated, and eating a high-fiber diet.

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### **What Are Haemorrhoids**

Haemorrhoids, also referred to as 'piles,' are swollen veins found in the rectum and anus. They are a common condition during pregnancy, affecting approximately 1 in 3 pregnancies. There are two main types of haemorrhoids:

**Internal haemorrhoids:** These are located inside the rectum and are not visible from the outside. A doctor may need to perform a rectal examination to detect them.

**External haemorrhoids:** These occur outside the anus and are visible. External haemorrhoids are more likely to cause noticeable symptoms.

Some individuals may experience both internal and external haemorrhoids simultaneously.

### **Symptoms of Haemorrhoids**

Haemorrhoids can cause several symptoms, which vary depending on the type and severity of the condition. Common symptoms include:

Bleeding from the rectum or anus, often noticed on toilet paper or stool.

Pain or burning during bowel movements.

Itching or discomfort around the anus, especially with external haemorrhoids.

While internal haemorrhoids usually don't cause pain, they may lead to minor bleeding. External haemorrhoids are more likely to be painful and visible.

### **When to See Your Doctor**

If you experience pain during bowel movements or notice blood on your stool or toilet paper, it's essential to consult a doctor. While these symptoms may indicate haemorrhoids, they can also be associated with other more serious conditions, so seeking medical advice is crucial.

### **Causes of Haemorrhoids During Pregnancy**

Pregnancy can increase the likelihood of developing haemorrhoids due to several factors:

**Pressure from the growing uterus:** As the uterus expands, it puts additional pressure on the veins in the rectal area, leading to haemorrhoids.

**Increased blood flow:** During pregnancy, the body undergoes changes in blood circulation, which can contribute to the development of haemorrhoids.

**Constipation:** Straining during bowel movements due to constipation can worsen or trigger haemorrhoids.

Pregnancy tends to make haemorrhoids more common, especially during the second and third trimesters. Women who are pregnant for the first time or those who have previously had haemorrhoids may experience more significant symptoms.

### **When Haemorrhoids Are More Likely to Occur During Pregnancy**

Haemorrhoids tend to become more noticeable as pregnancy progresses. The pressure on the rectal veins increases in the second and third trimesters due to the growing baby and uterus. As a result, haemorrhoids are more likely to develop during these later stages of pregnancy.

### **Haemorrhoids and Previous Pregnancy History**

If you had haemorrhoids before pregnancy, you may be more prone to experiencing them again or noticing a worsening of symptoms. It's essential to take extra precautions to avoid constipation and reduce straining, as these factors can exacerbate haemorrhoids during pregnancy.

However, some individuals may not be aware that they had haemorrhoids in the past, as they may not have caused symptoms previously. In such cases, it may be difficult to determine whether the haemorrhoids are new or a recurrence of an existing condition.

### **Managing Haemorrhoids During Pregnancy**

Managing haemorrhoids during pregnancy primarily focuses on preventing constipation and relieving discomfort. Some key management strategies include:

**Lifestyle changes:** A diet high in fiber and drinking plenty of water are crucial in preventing constipation, which can worsen haemorrhoids. Eating fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can help maintain a healthy digestive system.

**Ice packs:** Applying cold packs to external haemorrhoids can reduce swelling and provide pain relief.

**Warm baths:** Soaking in a warm bath can help ease pain and discomfort from haemorrhoids.

**Laxatives:** If constipation is an issue, using gentle laxatives can help make bowel movements easier. Always consult a doctor before using any medication during pregnancy.

**Pain relief:** Paracetamol is considered safe during pregnancy and can help relieve pain caused by haemorrhoids. Be sure to follow the prescribed dosage instructions.

**Haemorrhoid creams:** Over-the-counter creams containing corticosteroids or local anesthetics can help alleviate itching, pain, and inflammation. Always check with a doctor or pharmacist before using any creams during pregnancy.

## **Potential Serious Conditions Related to Haemorrhoids**

While haemorrhoids are common and usually not a cause for concern, it's important to inform your doctor if you experience symptoms like bleeding. Although bleeding from the rectum or anus is most often caused by haemorrhoids, it can sometimes indicate more serious conditions such as anal fissures, infections, or other gastrointestinal issues. A doctor can help determine the cause and provide appropriate treatment.

## **Impact of Haemorrhoids on Your Baby**

There is no evidence to suggest that haemorrhoids will affect your pregnancy or your baby. However, the pushing stage of labor may put additional strain on the veins around the anus, potentially worsening existing haemorrhoids. If you are concerned about haemorrhoids during pregnancy or labor, discuss your concerns with your midwife or healthcare provider.

## **Haemorrhoids After Birth**

In most cases, haemorrhoids improve or resolve shortly after childbirth. This

is often due to the reduced pressure on the veins once the baby is born. Maintaining a diet high in fiber and staying hydrated can help prevent constipation and support recovery.

If your haemorrhoids persist beyond the immediate postpartum period, or if you experience significant discomfort, speak to your doctor about further treatment options.

## **Preventing Haemorrhoids**

The best way to prevent haemorrhoids during pregnancy is by avoiding constipation. A healthy digestive system can prevent the need for straining during bowel movements, which is the main cause of haemorrhoids. To help reduce the risk:

Eat a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.

Incorporate regular physical activity to support bowel health.

If you follow these preventive measures, you can reduce the likelihood of developing haemorrhoids during pregnancy.

## **Tools And Assistance**

If you have concerns or need more information about managing haemorrhoids during pregnancy, consider consulting with your:

**Doctor or midwife:** They can provide medical advice, recommend treatment options, and monitor the condition during your pregnancy. They can help you navigate any complications related to haemorrhoids and provide care in case of severe symptoms.

**Obstetrician:** If you have any underlying concerns about the impact of haemorrhoids on your pregnancy, your obstetrician can help assess risks and ensure proper care. They can also provide specialized treatment options if necessary.

**Accredited dietitian:** A dietitian can assist in creating a balanced diet that helps prevent constipation and maintains overall digestive health. They can guide you on foods to eat that are high in fiber and support your digestive

system during pregnancy.

**Pharmacist:** A pharmacist can recommend over-the-counter products, such as creams or suppositories, to alleviate haemorrhoid symptoms. They can also inform you about safe medications and treatments to use during pregnancy.

**Support groups or helplines:** Connecting with others who are experiencing similar pregnancy-related challenges can provide emotional support. Many communities offer resources to help women manage symptoms and reduce anxiety about haemorrhoids during pregnancy.

These professionals and resources can help you address concerns, find the right treatment options, and improve your comfort during pregnancy.