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. Hemorrhoids are very common, and most people experience them at some point in their lives. Some of the symptoms of hemorrhoids include itching, discomfort, painless bleeding, swelling, or a lump near the anus. However, there are a number of ways to keep hemorrhoids at bay, so keep reading for a breakdown of many of them.

As constipation is a frequent cause of rectal problems such as 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 haven't 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. On the other hand, foods that are highly processed, such as products with white flour and juices without pulp, have less fiber. 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 isn't necessary. In fact, bowel movements may occur from once a week up to several times a day and still be typical. 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 physical activity may also help prevent constipation and pressure on the veins that lead to hemorrhoids. If you're overweight or obese, you may want to talk with your health care provider about developing strategies to lose weight, as extra pounds may be contributing to your hemorrhoids. Finally, try to 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, balanced eating habits and regular physical activity 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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