

Pregnancy and piles (haemorrhoids)

Piles are extremely common during pregnancy. In fact, for many women, pregnancy and childbirth is when they develop piles for the first time. Around one in three women will get piles during pregnancy so if you are suffering, you're not alone.

Piles (haemorrhoids)

Piles, also known as haemorrhoids, are swollen blood vessels in and around the anus that stretch and become swollen under pressure. In their mild form they remain inside the anus causing discomfort. External piles appear as dark red swellings around the anus, which can be extremely painful.

Causes of piles during pregnancy

There are a number of reasons women suffer piles in pregnancy. Your body goes through a lot of changes when you become pregnant and gradually these changes may cause piles.

The growing baby in the womb and pushing during labour puts pressure on blood vessels and obstructs the flow of blood in the veins. In addition, pregnancy hormones relax the blood vessels making blood flow sluggish. Consequently the veins become swollen or "varicose".

Being constipated will also increase the chances of developing piles. Pressure on the bowel from the baby in the womb, the effect of pregnancy hormones, taking less exercise than usual, a change in diet, and ignoring the call to go to the toilet all contribute to constipation during pregnancy. Constipation can then lead to piles.

Signs and symptoms of piles

The most common symptoms of piles are:

- Pain and soreness around the anus, particularly when going to the toilet.
- Itching and irritation around the anus.
- Small blood deposits on tissue paper after going to the toilet.
- A bulging or dragging sensation inside the anus.
- Occasional mucous discharge.

If you are suffering from any of the symptoms above, the likelihood is that you've got piles.

Treatments for piles when you're pregnant or breastfeeding

There are many suitable treatments you can use whilst pregnant or breast feeding, however, it is important you consult your doctor, midwife or pharmacist before using any medicine at this time. They are likely to recommend a treatment such as a safe topical anaesthetic or medicated suppository.

There are a number of haemorrhoid-relief products on the market. Look out for those which contain a local anaesthetic for fast relief of pain and discomfort, as well as an astringent to help reduce swelling and shrink the piles.

When choosing your treatment please remember that any products that contains hydrocortisone are not suitable for use during pregnancy. Please check with your pharmacist if you are in any doubt about this.

Prevention

Try to take regular, gentle exercise as it can stimulate regular bowel activity - walking and swimming are ideal!

- Go to the toilet when you need to and try to avoid straining.
- Eat high-fibre foods such as fruit, vegetables and wholemeal bread.
- Drink at least eight glasses of water a day and lots of fruit juices.

A wide range of women's health resources are available at www.healthywomen.org.uk

Disclaimer: This article is for general information only and is not intended to replace a consultation with a healthcare professional, nor is it intended to provide specific medical advice and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions.

© Copyright Bayer plc 2009 Last reviewed: April 3rd 2009 Doc ID: Oi111 Version: 1
