

Proctology and Haemorrhoids: Less Invasive and Painless Treatment

Proctology as a medical specialty is dedicated entirely to non-surgical or minimally invasive treatment of anal and rectal disorders, such as Haemorrhoids, Anal Fissure, Anal Fistula, Anal Bleeding or Anal Incontinence.

Haemorrhoids are one of the most common ailments known, where more than half the population from the age of 30 will at some stage, develop haemorrhoids. The modern methods that exist nowadays for the removal of some types of haemorrhoids, have resulted in less painful procedures.

Often described as "varicose veins of the anus and rectum", haemorrhoids are enlarged, bulging blood vessels in and about the anus and lower rectum. There are two types of haemorrhoids: external and internal, depending on where they are located. The symptoms are bleeding and/or protrusion during bowel movements, itching of the anal area, pain and sensitive lump(s).

External (outside) haemorrhoids develop near the anus and are covered by very sensitive skin. These are usually painless. However, if a blood clot (thrombosis) develops in an external haemorrhoid, it becomes a painful, hard lump. The external haemorrhoid may

bleed if it ruptures.

Internal (inside) haemorrhoids develop within the anus beneath the skin lining. Painless bleeding and protrusion during bowel movements are the most common symptom. However, an internal haemorrhoid can cause severe pain if it is completely "prolapsed" - protrudes from the anal opening and cannot be pushed back inside.

The exact cause of haemorrhoids is unknown, however the upright posture of humans alone, forces a great deal of pressure on the rectal veins, which sometimes causes them to bulge. Other contributing factors include: aging, chronic constipation or diarrhoea, pregnancy, genetic, straining during bowel movements, faulty bowel function due to overuse of laxatives or enemas or spending long periods of time (e.g. reading) on the toilet.

Whatever the cause, the tissues supporting the blood vessels stretch. As a result, the vessels dilate; their walls become thin and bleed. If the stretching and pressure con-



tinue, the weakened vessels protrude.

Mild symptoms can frequently be relieved by increasing the amount of fibre in the diet with e.g. fruits, vegetables, breads and cereals. Eliminating excessive straining reduces the pressure on haemorrhoids and helps prevent them from protruding. With these measures, the pain and swelling of most symptomatic haemorrhoids will decrease in two to seven days

and the firm lump should recede within four to six weeks.

Your Proctologist may elect to remove the haemorrhoid containing the clot with a small incision, in cases of severe or persistent pain from a thrombosed haemorrhoid. This procedure can be performed under local anaesthesia as an outpatient, and generally provides relief. Sclerotherapy is another treatment that can be carried out in the consulting room. It

involves injecting chemical irritants into the haemorrhoids, resulting in scarring and shrinkage, reducing the blood vessels present in the haemorrhoidal tissue. Sclerotherapy is a quick procedure, often painless, has few complications, and may take several short sessions to achieve relief of symptoms.

It is now possible to make an appointment with a Specialist Proctologist at the Hospital Particular do Algarve.

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