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Pregnancy: Hemorrhoids and Constipation

Topic Overview

Hemorrhoids are swollen veins at the end of the large intestine (anus). They often stick out from the anus (external hemorrhoids). They can also be located on the inside of the lower intestine (internal hemorrhoids). Bleeding, itching, and pain are common hemorrhoid symptoms.

Hemorrhoids are common during pregnancy, because:

- The enlarged uterus places extra pressure on the large vein (inferior vena cava) that drains the veins of the large intestine.
- Constipation, a common problem during pregnancy, causes less frequent and more strained bowel movements. The bowels commonly move more slowly during pregnancy. And iron in prenatal vitamins also can cause constipation.

To prevent or ease constipation and hemorrhoids:

- Eat a high-fibre diet (lots of whole fruits, vegetables, and whole grains).
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water.
- Don't strain (push hard) during a bowel movement.
- Increase the amount of exercise you get every day.

To treat the itching or pain of hemorrhoids:

- Keep the anus clean by wiping carefully or using a squirt bottle after each bowel movement. Gently wipe from the front to the back. Baby wipes or hemorrhoid pads are usually more gentle than toilet paper. If you use toilet paper, use only soft, undyed, unscented toilet paper.
- Take warm soaks in a tub or a sitz bath. Warm water can help shrink or soothe hemorrhoids. Add baking soda to the water to relieve itching.
- Apply ice pack compresses.
- Avoid sitting for long periods, especially on hard chairs.

Keep your health professional informed of any problems you are having with constipation or hemorrhoids. He or she may recommend:

- An over-the-counter or prescription medicine to apply to hemorrhoids to relieve the itching.
- A stool softener to prevent straining.

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⚠ Is it an emergency?

If you or someone in your care has chest pains, difficulty breathing, or severe bleeding, it could be a **life-threatening emergency**. Call **9-1-1** or the local emergency number immediately.

If you are concerned about a possible poisoning or exposure to a toxic substance, call **Poison Control** now at **1-800-567-8911**.