



Piles

Published: Tuesday, 27 May 2008, 4:32PM

Commonly referred to as piles, over half the population will suffer from haemorrhoids at some stage and tens of thousands will undergo painful surgery. Piles are incredibly common - at least 50 per cent of people suffer with them at some time.

What are piles?

People often think that piles are varicose veins in their bottom, but they're not. We have three 'cushions' - pads of tissue - in the anal canal which swell and contract, working as a valve to seal the end of it. If these become dilated and swollen, they may project into the anal canal to form visible swellings.

Symptoms

Itchy discomfort is experienced at the mild end of the spectrum. But as they worsen, they can become prolapsed, in other words pushed down below the back passage. At this stage they can tear and bleed and become increasingly uncomfortable.

Remedy and prevention

The first step to take is dietary - increasing fluid and fibre intake. This is vital. Your GP might also recommend suppositories and creams. For piles which bleed more frequently and prolapse, patients are often referred to a hospital consultant.

Operations

Band ligation - a small rubber band is used at the base of the pile to strangle it and cut off the blood supply. This shrivels up the piles, returning the swollen pads of tissue to their original size.

Haemorrhoidectomy or a stapled haemorrhoidectomy - the piles are cut off and the wounds left open inside the body. This can be very painful for up to three weeks until they heal.

HALO - first introduced to this country four years ago. No cuts are made, it causes far less pain than other haemorrhoid operations and it has a very low complication rate. Also, general anaesthetic isn't necessary and the whole procedure takes about 20 minutes.