

Piles (Haemorrhoids) and their Treatment

‘**Piles**’ is the common term for haemorrhoids. **Haemorrhoids** may be internal (inside the anus) or external (outside the anus). Internal piles are overgrowths of the lining of the anus. External piles are overgrowths of the skin outside the anus. Internal and external piles may exist separately or together.

Causes of piles include constipated stools and straining to evacuate, a diet deficient in fibre, and childbirth. Some other conditions of the bowel may be associated with piles.

Symptoms may include bleeding, discomfort, and a feeling of incomplete evacuation (tenesmus); external piles may be troublesome by their very presence and cause difficulty with anal cleanliness. More extensive piles may ‘prolapse’ and come outside the anus.

Diagnosis is by inspection of the anus both internally and externally. It is important to rule out other conditions which may mimic piles.

Treatment is dependent on the extent of the piles. The simplest piles to treat are those that are internal and the treatments are carried out internally within the anus. The treatments are ‘**banding**’ and ‘**injecting**’ and may be used together or individually. They cause minimal discomfort only and may be performed as an out-patient in the consulting room, or as part of other investigations under sedation or anaesthetic in hospital. These treatments may be used repetitively. More extensive piles require surgery.

Haemorrhoidectomy is the traditional operation and involves cutting the piles out surgically. This is very effective and usually a permanent cure but may be painful. Alternatives have therefore been developed.

Stapled haemorrhoidopexy or the PPH operation (Procedure for Prolapse and Haemorrhoids), is less painful but not entirely so. A stapling device is used to remove a circle of the haemorrhoids within the anus. It is very effective for piles which come down (‘prolapse’) but does not deal with external piles. It is not recommended for patients who practice anal intercourse.

HALO – RAR is the latest development. **HALO** stands for ‘**Ultrasonically guided Haemorrhoid Artery Ligation Operation**’. This utilizes a specially designed ultrasonic probe to identify the arteries supplying the haemorrhoids within the upper anus, which are then interrupted by stitches. **RAR** stands for ‘**Recto–Anal Repair**’ and is for the prolapsing component of the piles. It involves stitching them and drawing them up inside the anus. These procedures are performed under a general anaesthetic in hospital. Because they involve stitching but no cutting they are less painful than the traditional or stapled operations and this is their advantage and attraction. The disadvantage is that external piles are not dealt with and the piles may return in time. Further information on this procedure is available at www.halocentre.com.