Dr Scott Explains

Haemorrhoids & Rubber Band Ligation

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What are Haemorrhoids?
Haemorrhoids are not a disease.

Haemorrhoids are cushions of vascular tissue containing lots of blood vessels in the last inch or so of the back passage.

These vascular cushions are a normal part of the back passage in everyone. But when the vascular cushions either bleed (bright red blood on the toilet paper, on the stool or in the toilet bowl) and/or prolapse – they are called Haemorrhoids.

What does prolapse mean?
During a bowel movement, Haemorrhoids can be pushed out of the back passage and appear like a bunch of grapes protruding from the back passage opening. Sometimes prolapsed Haemorrhoids will go back inside spontaneously - or they may be pushed back inside. In severe prolapse the Haemorrhoids may stay out all of the time.

Are there different types of Haemorrhoids?
Haemorrhoids are classified by whether they bleed or whether they prolapse.

1st degree haemorrhoids only bleed and do not prolapse

2nd degree haemorrhoids prolapse but return spontaneously

3rd degree haemorrhoids prolapse but return on manual pressure

4th degree haemorrhoids prolapse and cannot be returned

Do haemorrhoids cause any other problems?
Haemorrhoids do not cause pain as a rule. They can cause itchiness around the perianal skin in a few cases.

Sometimes haemorrhoids are associated with skin tags.

How are Haemorrhoids diagnosed?
In all cases, ruling out other serious causes of bleeding by a telescope examination of the back passage and lower bowel is essential - a flexible sigmoidoscopy.

Once a serious cause of the bleeding has been excluded the doctor can identify the Haemorrhoids just inside the opening of the back passage.

Should Haemorrhoids always be treated?
No – as Haemorrhoids are a normal part of the back passage they only require treatment if the symptoms of bleeding and/or prolapse are particularly troublesome.

Things you can do to help:

Avoid constipation and straining at the toilet

Eat plenty of fibre by eating plenty of fruit, vegetables, cereals, wholemeal bread, etc.
Have lots to drink. Adults should aim to drink at least two litres per day.

Fibre supplements. If a high fibre diet is not helping - try Fybogel

Toileting. Go to the toilet as soon as possible after feeling the need.

**What is Rubber Band Ligation?**

If your Haemorrhoid symptoms are troublesome, Rubber Band Ligation of Haemorrhoids reduces symptoms in 2 out of 3 patients. However, it is especially important to know that no Haemorrhoid treatment can stop all rectal bleeding for good.

Rubber Band Ligation is a procedure in which the Haemorrhoid is tied off at its base with a small rubber band - so cutting off the blood flow to the Haemorrhoid. A scar then forms at the base of the Haemorrhoid reducing its tendency to bleed and/or prolapse.

**What does the Rubber Band treatment involve?**

This is an outpatient treatment done with or without sedation. Having completed the telescope examination of the lower bowel, a second very short telescope is placed in the back passage. A device is then used to place a small rubber band on the lining of the back passage above each of the three main Haemorrhoids – it takes 1 to 2 minutes to do.

**What should I expect after Rubber Band Ligation?**

This varies from person to person – most get back to normal activities the following day.

There can be an aching sensation in the back passage for 24 to 48 hours after the procedure. Bleeding often occurs afterwards and for several weeks thereafter.

It is very rare for Rubber Band Ligation to cause severe pain and in these circumstances the band has to be removed under a general anaesthetic.

**Are there any serious side effects from Rubber Band ligation?**

Rubber Band Ligation is used many thousands of times per year, worldwide and in the UK. Very rarely life threatening pelvic sepsis has resulted from this treatment.

You must seek medical attention if you become aware of any of the following symptoms after Rubber Band Ligation:

- cannot pass urine
- develop a fever
- severe anal/pelvic pain

**When should I expect an improvement in my symptoms after Rubber Band Ligation?**

The rubber bands fall off the bowel lining within a few hours to a few days – you may or may not see one of the bands when this happens.

It probably takes six weeks or so to be aware of improvement in Haemorrhoid symptoms – and as noted before it is not possible to stop all rectal bleeding once and for all.

**What if there is no improvement after Rubber Band Ligation?**

In this case it might be useful to repeat the Rubber Band treatment on one or two further occasions. Continued prolapsing of large Haemorrhoids is best dealt with by surgical Haemorrhidectomy.

**Any Questions**

No question is ever too minor or too silly to ask, so please ask any member of the team caring for you if there is anything you wish to know.