

DRUGS FOR RECTAL AND ANAL DISORDERS

The most common disorder affecting the rectum (the last part of the large intestine) and anus (the opening from the rectum) is haemorrhoids, commonly known as piles. They occur when haemorrhoidal veins become swollen or irritated, often due to prolonged local pressure such as that caused by a pregnancy or a job requiring long hours of sitting. Haemorrhoids may cause irritation and pain, especially on defecation, and are aggravated by constipation and straining during defecation. In some cases haemorrhoids may bleed, and occasionally clots form in the swollen veins, leading to severe pain, a condition called thrombosed haemorrhoids.

Other common disorders include anal fissure (painful cracks in the anus) and pruritus ani (itching around the anus). Anal disorders of all kinds occur less frequently in people who have soft, bulky stools.

A number of both over-the-counter and prescription-only preparations are available for the relief of such disorders.

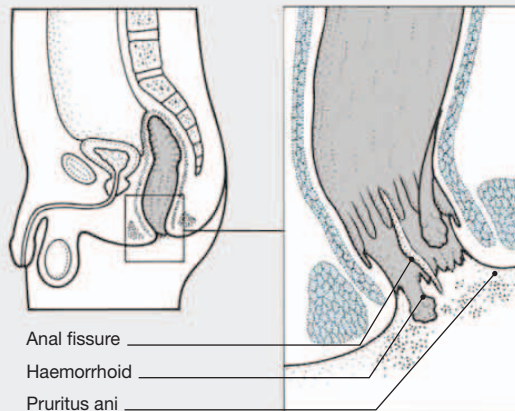
Why they are used

Preparations for relief of haemorrhoids and anal discomfort fall into three main groups: creams or suppositories that act locally to relieve inflammation and irritation; glyceryl trinitrate ointment, which reduces pain by relieving anal pressure and increasing blood flow; and measures that relieve constipation, which contributes to the formation of, and discomfort from, haemorrhoids and anal fissure.

Preparations from the first group often contain a soothing agent with antiseptic, astringent, or vasoconstrictor properties. Ingredients of this type include zinc oxide, bismuth, hamamelis (witch hazel), and Peru balsam. Some of these products also include a mild local anaesthetic

DISORDERS OF THE RECTUM AND ANUS

The rectum and anus form the last part of the digestive tract. Common conditions affecting the area include swelling of the veins around the anus (haemorrhoids), cracks in the anus (anal fissure), and inflammation or irritation of the anus and surrounding area (pruritus ani).



(see p.36) such as lidocaine. In some cases a doctor may prescribe an ointment containing a corticosteroid to relieve inflammation around the anus (see Topical corticosteroids, p.134).

People who suffer from haemorrhoids or anal fissure are generally advised to include in their diets plenty of fluids and fibre-rich foods, such as fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grain products, both to prevent constipation and to ease defecation. A mild bulk-forming or softening laxative may also be prescribed (see p.69).

Neither of these treatments can shrink large haemorrhoids, although they may provide relief while anal fissures heal naturally. Severe, persistently painful haemorrhoids that continue to be

troublesome in spite of these measures may need to be removed surgically or, more commonly, by banding with specially applied small rubber bands (see below left).

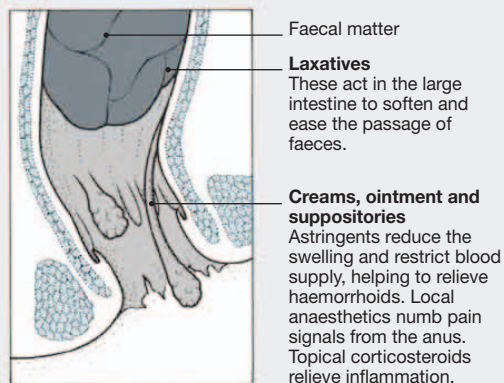
How they affect you

The treatments described above usually relieve discomfort, especially during defecation. Most people experience no adverse effects, although preparations containing local anaesthetics may cause irritation or even a rash in the anal area. It is rare for ingredients in locally acting preparations to be absorbed into the body in sufficient quantities to cause generalized side effects.

The main risk is that self-treatment of haemorrhoids may delay diagnosis of bowel cancer. It is therefore always wise to consult your doctor if symptoms of haemorrhoids are present, especially if you have noticed bleeding from the rectum or a change in bowel habits.

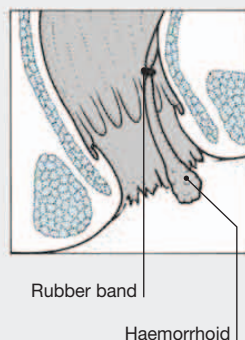
SITES OF DRUG ACTION

The illustration below shows how and where drugs for the treatment of rectal disorders act to relieve symptoms.



Banding treatment

A small rubber band is applied tightly to a haemorrhoid, thereby blocking off its blood supply. The haemorrhoid will eventually wither away.



COMMON DRUGS

Soothing and astringent agents

Aluminium acetate
Bismuth
Peru balsam
Zinc oxide

Topical corticosteroids
Hydrocortisone *

Local anaesthetics
(see p.36)

Laxatives
(see p.69)

Other drugs
Glyceryl trinitrate *

* See Part 3