HEALTH & BEAUTY

YOUR WELLNESS GUIDE



HEALTHY LIVING

Is prolonged stay in diapers harmful to a baby boy?

page 25



Don't ignore mental wellness

page 26

PILES: DO NOT IGNORE SIGNS

By David Lukiiza

For four weeks, Samuel Kasasa endured persistent and unfamiliar anal pain that gradually began to interfere with his daily life. What started as mild discomfort soon escalated into sharp pain whenever he visited the toilet, sometimes leaving visible bloodstains afterward. At first, he dismissed it as a minor irritation, hoping it would go away on its own. But when the symptoms persisted, anxiety began to set in.

Kasasa says he was so uncomfortable and confused that he did not understand what was happening to his body. The bleeding, in particular, alarmed him.

"What scared me most was the fact that when I would clean the anal area, the tissue carried bloodstains," he recalls. "That is when I started imagining the worst."

Like many people who experience unexplained rectal bleeding, his thoughts quickly turned to serious illnesses. He feared he might be suffering from ulcers or even cancer. The uncertainty weighed heavily on him, prompting him to finally seek medical attention rather than continue suffering in silence.

After a medical examination, doctors diagnosed him with haemorrhoids, commonly known as piles. Although the condition was painful and distressing, the diagnosis brought immense relief, especially after weeks of fearing cancer. He is now undergoing treatment and says his symptoms are gradually improving.



WHAT ARE HAEMORRHOIDS?

According to Dr Beatrice Namirembe, a general practitioner at the Surgery Hospital in Kampala, haemorrhoids – also known as piles – are swellings that develop inside the rectum or around the anus.

"They are enlarged or swollen blood vessels within the rectum or the anus," she explains.

Haemorrhoids are a common condition affecting both men and women, particularly adults. They may develop as a result of prolonged constipation, straining during bowel movements, sitting for long periods, pregnancy or a low-fibre diet. In some cases, lifestyle factors such as lack of physical activity can also contribute to their development.

One of the most noticeable symptoms, Namirembe says, is seeing bright red blood in the stool or on toilet paper after wiping. While the sight of blood can be frightening, she notes that haemorrhoids are usually not life-threatening, though they can cause significant discomfort.

People with haemorrhoids often experience itching or irritation around the anal area.

"Haemorrhoids also lead to pain and discomfort, especially when sitting or passing stool," she says.

In some cases, patients may notice swollen, tender lumps around the anus. These can become extremely painful, particularly if a blood clot forms inside them – a condition known as thrombosed haemorrhoids.

"Sometimes the patient finds themselves having mucus discharge from the anal area, often noticed on toilet paper or underwear," she adds.

Namirembe advises that anyone experiencing persistent anal pain or rectal bleeding should seek medical evaluation. Although haemorrhoids are common, similar symptoms can also signal more serious conditions that require prompt treatment. Early diagnosis not only relieves fear, but also ensures appropriate care and quick recovery.

PHOTO BY DAVID LUKIIZA



Haemorrhoids are painful and cause discomfort

CAUSES

Namirembe says haemorrhoids have multiple causes, most of which are linked to lifestyle habits that increase pressure in the rectum or around the anus. Over time, repeated strain weakens the supporting tissues and causes blood vessels in the area to swell.

"People who are heavy lifters are common candidates for this condition," she says. "The pressure absorbed by the abdomen during lifting is transferred to the rectum, which can lead to internal haemorrhoids."

Chronic constipation is another major contributor. Namirembe explains that individuals who frequently pass hard stools often spend long periods on the toilet and strain excessively, a habit that can result in external haemorrhoids. Straining increases pressure on the anal veins, causing them to enlarge and sometimes become painful.

However, it is not only those who struggle with hard stools who are at risk.

"People who take several days without passing faeces are also prone to developing haemorrhoids," she notes, explaining that irregular bowel movements can lead to increased straining when relief finally comes.

Prolonged sitting is another overlooked risk factor.

"This is very common among people working in the corporate world, where they spend long hours seated without realising they are exposing themselves to this condition," she says.

Pregnancy also significantly increases the risk of developing piles. Namirembe notes that many pregnant women, especially in the second and third trimesters and during the postpartum period, experience haemorrhoids.

"Research shows that this condition affects about 25% to 41% of pregnant women, with some studies suggesting the prevalence may be as high as 85%," she says. This is largely due to pressure from the growing uterus, increased blood volume, hormonal changes – particularly progesterone – and pregnancy-related constipation.

Diet also plays a critical role. Dr Max Ojangole Igune, a nutritionist at Hunger Fighters Uganda, emphasises that people whose diets lack sufficient fibre are at higher risk.

"People who do not eat plenty of greens and vegetables, but instead consume a lot of processed foods could also develop piles," Igune says. A low-fibre diet often leads to constipation, which in turn increases pressure on the veins in the rectum and anus.

Former Uganda Medical Association president Dr

Continued on page 24

ARE THEY FATAL?

Dr Beatrice Namirembe reassures that haemorrhoids are rarely fatal and are generally not considered deadly. However, in extremely rare cases, complications such as severe bleeding or infection can become serious if left untreated. She advises seeking medical attention as soon as symptoms appear to prevent complications and ensure proper diagnosis, since rectal bleeding can sometimes indicate more serious conditions.



Namirembe