



# Haemorrhoids: A Comprehensive Review from Ayurvedic and Modern Perspectives

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## Abstract

Haemorrhoids, commonly known as piles, are vascular structures in the anal canal that become inflamed, swollen, or prolapsed, leading to discomfort, pain, and rectal bleeding. Both Ayurveda and modern medicine recognize haemorrhoids as a significant health issue. This article offers an extensive review of haemorrhoids, including clinical features, pathophysiology, and treatment approaches from both modern medical and Ayurvedic perspectives. Special emphasis is given to Ayurveda's holistic treatments like Ksharasutra and Panchakarma, alongside conventional therapies like sclerotherapy and surgical intervention.

**Keywords:** Haemorrhoids, Ksharasutra, Ayurveda, piles, Ksharakarma, surgery, modern medicine, anorectal disorders, pathophysiology, herbal remedies

## Introduction

Haemorrhoids are one of the most common anorectal conditions, affecting millions globally. Modern medicine attributes haemorrhoids to factors like chronic constipation, a sedentary lifestyle, and increased intra-abdominal pressure. Ayurveda, on the other hand, classifies haemorrhoids under "Arsha," a disease caused by an imbalance of the Doshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—leading to obstruction in the channels (Srotas) and improper functioning of Agni (digestive fire). This article aims to explore the comprehensive understanding of haemorrhoids in both systems of medicine, highlighting diagnostic, therapeutic, and preventive measures.

## Clinical Features

### Modern Perspective:

- **Internal Haemorrhoids:**
  - Internal haemorrhoids originate from the superior haemorrhoidal plexus above the dentate line. These haemorrhoids are classified into four grades:
    1. **Grade I:** No prolapse, just prominent blood vessels.
    2. **Grade II:** Prolapse upon straining but spontaneously reduce.
    3. **Grade III:** Prolapse requiring manual reduction.
    4. **Grade IV:** Irreducible prolapse.

- Symptoms include painless rectal bleeding, mucus discharge, and prolapse of the anal cushion. Discomfort arises when haemorrhoids prolapse and become irritated or thrombosed<sup>1</sup>.

- **External Haemorrhoids:**

- These haemorrhoids originate from the inferior haemorrhoidal plexus, situated below the dentate line. They are often painful due to the rich innervation of the area. Thrombosis of an external haemorrhoid can cause sudden, sharp pain accompanied by swelling<sup>2</sup>.

- **Symptomatology:**

- Symptoms of haemorrhoids include:
  - Bright red blood per rectum
  - Perianal itching or irritation
  - Pain during bowel movements
  - Mucus discharge
  - Palpable anal lumps<sup>3</sup>.

### Ayurvedic Perspective:

- **Arsha (Haemorrhoids):**

- In Ayurveda, Arsha is described as a condition where enlarged vascular structures (similar to modern haemorrhoids) obstruct the pathway of Vata, leading to discomfort and pain. The classification of Arsha is based on the predominance of Doshas:

1. **Vataja Arsha:** Dry, painful haemorrhoids with blackish discoloration.
2. **Pittaja Arsha:** Red, inflamed, and bleeding piles.
3. **Kaphaja Arsha:** Large, pale, and non-bleeding piles<sup>4</sup>.

- **Dosha Imbalance:**

- Vata's obstruction and Pitta's heat lead to inflammation, while Kapha's excessive mucous production contributes to swelling. Agni Dushti (digestive fire impairment) results in chronic constipation, further aggravating the condition<sup>5</sup>.

- **Classifications:**

- Ayurvedic texts also categorize Arsha into two types based on its origin:
  1. **Sahaja (Congenital):** Inherited or present from birth.
  2. **Jataja (Acquired):** Developed due to improper diet, lifestyle, or disease<sup>6</sup>.

### Pathophysiology

#### Modern Perspective:

- **Vascular Hyperplasia:**

- Haemorrhoids arise from the hyperplasia of vascular tissue in the anal canal. Straining during defecation increases intra-abdominal pressure, leading to engorgement and swelling of the haemorrhoidal cushions. Prolonged straining weakens the connective tissue, causing prolapse<sup>7</sup>.

- **Venous Stasis:**

- Another contributing factor is venous stasis, where the flow of blood in the anal venous plexus is impeded, leading to congestion, dilatation, and eventual prolapse of haemorrhoidal tissue<sup>8</sup>.

- **Risk Factors:**

- Chronic constipation, diarrhoea, a low-fibre diet, obesity, pregnancy, and prolonged sitting or standing all contribute to increased intra-abdominal pressure and risk of haemorrhoid formation<sup>9</sup>.

### Ayurvedic Perspective:

- **Ama and Malasanchaya (Accumulation of Toxins and Faecal Matter):**

- Agni Dushti results in improper digestion, leading to the accumulation of Ama (toxins) in the body. These toxins, along with uneliminated faecal matter, accumulate in the large intestine, obstructing the movement of Vata and contributing to the formation of Arsha<sup>10</sup>.

- **Doshic Imbalance:**

- The predominant dosha in each type of Arsha dictates the pathophysiology. In Vataja Arsha, the dryness and roughness of Vata cause hard stools and painful defecation, while in Pittaja Arsha, the heat and inflammation lead to burning sensations and bleeding<sup>11</sup>.

### Treatment

#### Modern Perspective:

- **Conservative Management:**

- For Grade I and II haemorrhoids, lifestyle modifications such as increasing dietary fibre, staying hydrated, and avoiding straining during defecation are recommended. Sitz baths and topical ointments like hydrocortisone or lidocaine are used to reduce inflammation and discomfort<sup>12</sup>.

- **Non-Surgical Procedures:**

- **Rubber Band Ligation:** A band is placed around the base of the haemorrhoid to cut off blood supply, leading to necrosis and sloughing off of the tissue<sup>13</sup>.
- **Sclerotherapy:** A chemical solution is injected into the haemorrhoid, causing it to shrink<sup>14</sup>.
- **Infrared Coagulation (IRC):** Infrared light is used to coagulate the blood vessels, cutting off the blood supply to the haemorrhoid<sup>15</sup>.

- **Surgical Treatment:**

- In cases of Grade III and IV haemorrhoids or if conservative measures fail, haemorrhoidectomy (removal of haemorrhoidal tissue) is performed. This can be done through traditional open surgery or the more advanced stapled haemorrhoidopexy, which is less painful and has a quicker recovery time<sup>16</sup>.

#### Ayurvedic Perspective:

- **Ksharasutra Therapy:**

- A highly effective Ayurvedic treatment for Arsha is the Ksharasutra (medicated thread) ligation. The thread is coated with herbal alkaline substances (Kshara) and tied around the haemorrhoid. This causes the haemorrhoid to shrink and eventually fall off. Ksharasutra is minimally invasive and has a high success rate with fewer complications than surgery<sup>17</sup>.

- **Panchakarma:**

- **Virechana (Purgation):** Virechana helps in expelling the accumulated toxins and balancing Pitta, which is often aggravated in Pittaja Arsha.
- **Basti (Enema):** Medicated enemas (oil-based or decoction-based) help to regulate Vata and soften the stools, reducing the strain during bowel movements<sup>18</sup>.

- **Herbal Remedies:**

- Herbal formulations like Triphala, Aragvadhā (Cassia fistula), and Amalaki (Emblica officinalis) are used to regulate bowel movements and prevent constipation. Haritaki (Terminalia chebula) is especially effective in Vataja Arsha for its laxative properties and ability to reduce dryness<sup>19</sup>.

- **Diet and Lifestyle Modifications:**

- Ayurveda emphasizes the role of diet (Pathya) in managing Arsha. A diet rich in fibre, including green leafy vegetables, whole grains, and adequate hydration, is recommended. Avoiding spicy, oily, and constipating foods is essential to balance Pitta and Kapha doshas<sup>20</sup>.

- **Rasayana Therapy:**

- Rejuvenative therapy (Rasayana) strengthens the tissues and supports the digestive fire. Herbs like Shatavari (Asparagus racemosus) and Ashwagandha (Withania somnifera) are recommended for their immune-boosting and tissue-regenerating properties<sup>21</sup>.

## Conclusion

Haemorrhoids (Arsha) are a significant health concern, especially in individuals with chronic constipation, a sedentary lifestyle, or other risk factors. While modern medicine offers effective treatments, including surgical options, Ayurveda provides a more holistic and preventive approach. The integration of both systems of medicine, particularly with Ksharasutra therapy and lifestyle modifications, can offer a comprehensive and long-term solution to managing haemorrhoids.

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