



THE PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANT LEARN & ADVISE



MODULE 38: JUNE 2018

Lower gastrointestinal health

Pharmacies stock a range of products that customers can purchase to treat conditions that affect the lower gastrointestinal (GI) tract. Being able to advise customers how best to use these products, making confident recommendations and knowing when to refer to the pharmacist are all essential skills for pharmacy teams.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this module, assistants will:

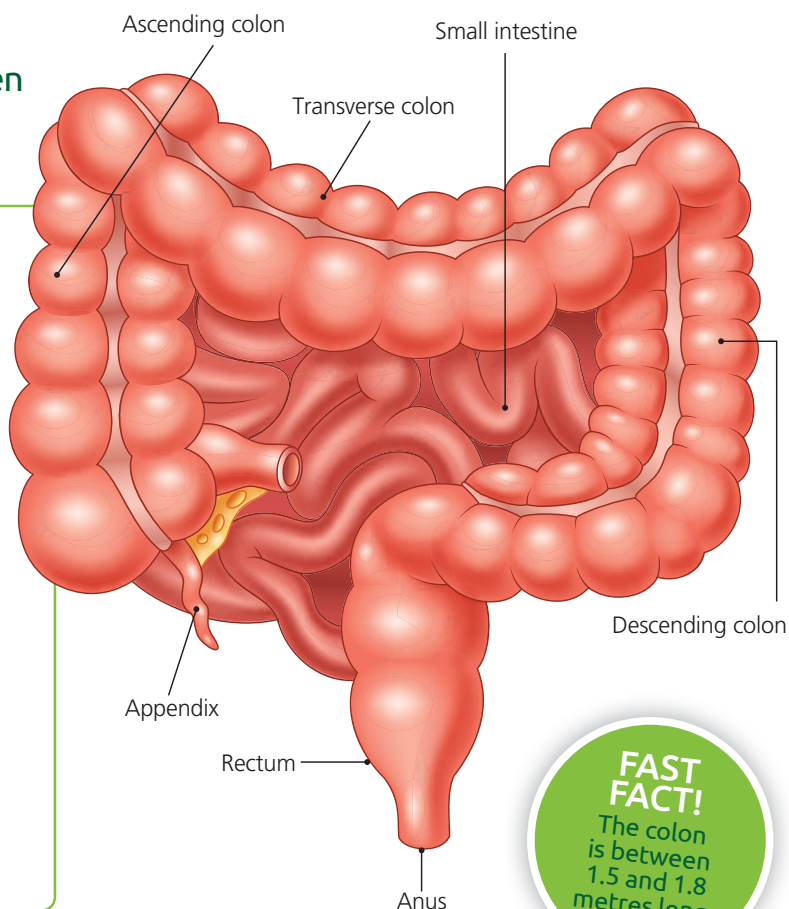
- Understand the common conditions that can affect the lower gastrointestinal tract
- Be familiar with some of the OTC treatments that are available and be able to recommend their use
- Be able to offer appropriate self care advice
- Know when to refer to the pharmacist.

The lower GI tract

The gastrointestinal (GI) tract is a tube of muscle that runs from the mouth to the anus. It is generally referred to in two parts: the upper GI tract, which includes the stomach and the oesophagus, and the lower GI tract, which includes the intestines, rectum and anus. The lower GI tract is often referred to as the bowel(s).

In the **large intestine**, or **colon**, water and salts are absorbed from waste matter to create faeces. Millions of natural bacteria live in the colon, helping to break down undigested food, neutralising harmful substances and creating vitamin K, which is essential for blood clotting. Muscular, wave-like movements called peristalsis push the contents of the colon down towards the **rectum**, triggering the need for a bowel movement, when faeces are expelled from the body through the **anus**.

Everyone has different bowel habits, varying from needing to go to the toilet several times a day to as little as three times a week.



FAST FACT!
The colon is between 1.5 and 1.8 metres long.



This module is suitable for all members of the pharmacy team who wish to increase their knowledge of common conditions, treatment options and communication skills. This module has been endorsed with the NPA's Training Seal as suitable for use by pharmacy teams as part of their ongoing learning. This module can also form part of your Team Tuesday training.



DID YOU KNOW?

As many as one in two people in the UK will have piles at some point in their lifetime.



Understanding the problem

1

Haemorrhoids or piles as they are more commonly known, are associated with increased pressure on the blood vessels in the rectum and anus, and can be either internal or external. It is not fully understood why piles occur, but straining to go to the toilet, pregnancy, being overweight or lifting heavy objects are all contributory factors. Symptoms include bleeding after a bowel movement (the blood is bright red), itching, and protruding lumps and soreness in and around the area.

2

Constipation is when a person is not having bowel movements as often as is normal for them, or if they having difficulty passing stools, which may be dry and lumpy. There may also be associated nausea and/or stomach ache. Constipation can be caused by not eating enough fibre or drinking enough fluids, as well as by certain medicines, changes to the usual diet, lack of exercise or stress.



3

Diarrhoea is the passing of frequent watery stools. There may be other symptoms too, such as stomach cramps, loss of appetite, dehydration or a fever. The causes of diarrhoea include infection, food intolerances and allergies, as well as certain medicines.

IBS

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) can trigger a range of symptoms, including bloating, constipation, cramps, diarrhoea, flatulence and feelings of tiredness. These symptoms might come and go, but IBS tends to stay with a person for life. Customers experiencing new symptoms of suspected IBS should be referred to the pharmacist.

When to refer

Signs for referral to the pharmacist include:

- **Haemorrhoids:** rectal bleeding, painful or persistent haemorrhoids
- **Diarrhoea:** recent foreign travel or a hospital stay, antibiotic use, diarrhoea lasting longer than two or three days in adults, persistent vomiting or signs of dehydration
- **Constipation:** no improvement after treatment, bloating or regular/long-lasting symptoms
- **Children, the elderly and pregnant women** should always be referred
- **Anyone with blood in the faeces, fever or weight loss.**

Check your pharmacy protocol for additional information regarding referral.



DID YOU KNOW?

In pregnancy, the extra weight of the baby can contribute to haemorrhoids.

Treatment options

1

Haemorrhoids

Treatment options include creams and ointments, which are intended for external piles, and suppositories, for internal piles. These contain ingredients such as: astringents (e.g. bismuth salts) to help soothe and reduce swelling; antiseptics (e.g. balsam peru) to protect against infection; emollients to protect the skin, and local anaesthetics (e.g. lidocaine) to reduce itching and pain. Hydrocortisone is an anti-inflammatory agent and should only be used for five to seven days. If symptoms persist following treatment, refer the customer to the pharmacist. OTC examples include Anusol.

Some customers find ointments, which are greasier than creams, alleviate dry skin. Customers may also find that moist toilet wipes are more comfortable to use than toilet paper if the area is sore.

2

Constipation

Increasing dietary fibre and fluid intake, as well as taking regular exercise can help to ease constipation. OTC laxatives can also be recommended. These work in different ways, depending on their active ingredients. Some are stimulants (e.g. senna), some are bulk-forming (e.g. ispaghula husk), some are osmotic (e.g. lactulose) and others are stool softeners (e.g. sodium docusate). Glycerol suppositories for rectal use can also be used as a short-term treatment. OTC examples include Dulcolax, Fybogel and Senokot.



3

Diarrhoea

Staying hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids or using oral rehydration salts (e.g. Dioralyte) is important for customers affected by diarrhoea. For those who want something to slow down their bowel movements, loperamide is an anti-diarrhoeal treatment, but it cannot be sold over the counter for children under 12. OTC examples include Imodium.

4

IBS

Treatment will depend on the symptoms being experienced at the time. They include antispasmodics such as hyoscine butylbromide for stomach cramps and spasms (e.g. Buscopan), loperamide (for diarrhoea) and laxatives for constipation. Peppermint oil (e.g. Colpermin) may also provide relief from IBS symptoms.

Nutritional products that help to support digestive health, such as prebiotics and probiotics, are also available for customers to try.



Additional advice

In order to help keep the bowels healthy, customers should:

- Eat a varied diet, that includes plenty of dietary fibre
- Keep to a healthy weight
- Exercise regularly
- Take care with certain medicines (e.g. codeine, which can cause constipation)
- Drink plenty of water
- Not ignore the urge to go to the toilet
- Wash their hands well after going to the toilet
- Take precautions to reduce the risk of food poisoning when travelling
- Stay away from work or school for two days and avoid using swimming pools for two weeks after having diarrhoea caused by an infection.



SIGNPOSTING

For more information, you can:

- Use your *Counter Intelligence Plus* training guide
- Visit NHS Choices: [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk).

TEST YOURSELF ONLINE

GOOD PRACTICE KNOWLEDGE IS IMPORTANT WHEN ADVISING CUSTOMERS



Questions

1) Which of the following is **NOT** part of the lower GI tract?

- a) Anus
- b) Colon
- c) Oesophagus
- d) Rectum

2) Bacteria in the lower GI tract do **NOT**:

- a) Create vitamin K
- b) Neutralise harmful substances
- c) Break down undigested food
- d) Cause thrush

3) Which of the following is an astringent sometimes used in haemorrhoid treatments?

- a) Bismuth salts
- b) Lidocaine
- c) Hydrocortisone
- d) Mebeverine

4) Which of the following is an osmotic laxative?

- a) Bisacodyl
- b) Ispaghula husk
- c) Lactulose
- d) Senna

5) Which of the following self care advice is **NOT** appropriate for a customer with constipation?

- a) Drink plenty of fluids
- b) Exercise regularly
- c) Increase dietary fibre intake
- d) Use loperamide three times a day

6) Which of the following customers would you refer to the pharmacist?

- a) Mrs Jones, 42, has external piles – her symptoms of itching and irritation started yesterday
- b) Mr Kalzam, 64, has had external piles for three weeks and has tried an ointment without any improvement
- c) Mrs Singh, 36, has diarrhoea that started yesterday
- d) Miss Stevens, 24, is stressed about her wedding in a week's time and has developed constipation



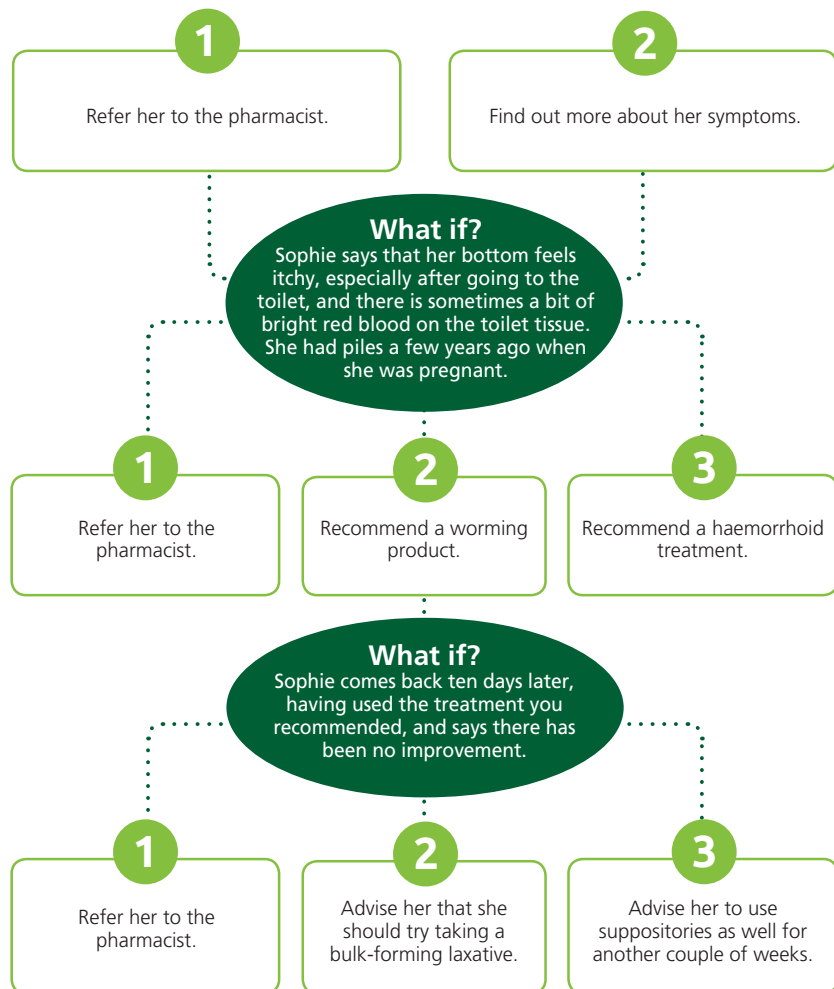
Scenario

Sophie, who is in her 40s, asks for a private chat. She thinks she has piles and wonders what treatment you would advise.



What would you recommend?

For each part of this scenario, think about the decision you would make and, importantly, why you would choose that option. In addition, for each decision that you make, think about how you would talk to the customer and provide the necessary advice. Discuss this with your team and pharmacist.



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Advising on managing haemorrhoids

Haemorrhoids (or piles) can be painful and the condition can have an impact on a sufferer's life and wellbeing, causing anxiety, stress and embarrassment.

Despite one in two people suffering from haemorrhoids at some point in their lives, the condition remains taboo for many, which means that sufferers are reluctant to ask for advice or spend time at the fixture choosing a treatment.

Not only can pharmacy teams help to remove the social stigma associated with the condition by normalising it, but they can recommend appropriate products as well as useful information and advice to help prevent recurrence.

What is it?

Haemorrhoids are enlarged blood vessels inside or around the bottom (rectum and anus).¹ They can be classified as either

internal, or external depending on where they are in relation to the anal canal.²

Treatment

In most cases, symptoms will clear up within a week or two. However, topical treatments such as creams, ointments and suppositories can provide symptomatic relief.

These contain multiple ingredients, including astringent, lubricants, antiseptic, local anaesthetic, and/or corticosteroids.²

Creams and ointments are normally used for

external haemorrhoids while suppositories are used for internal haemorrhoids.

Interestingly, once a patient chooses a product to alleviate their symptoms they stay loyal, with 58 per cent of people not considering switching.³

Why recommend Anusol?

The Anusol range provides effective soothing relief for piles and is available in a choice of formats: creams, ointments and suppositories across GSL, P and POM categories.

The base range contains an

astringent to help soothe the area and reduce swelling, an antiseptic to reduce the risk of infection, and an emollient to help protect sore skin. The advanced products contain the additional benefit of an anti-inflammatory.



How to use Anusol

Anusol Cream and Ointment – thoroughly cleanse the affected area, dry, and apply the cream. Apply to the affected area at night, in the morning and after each evacuation until the condition is controlled.

For internal conditions: use the rectal nozzle. Remove the nozzle cap. Clean the nozzle after each use.

Anusol suppositories – remove the wrapper and insert one suppository into the anus at night, in the morning and after each evacuation.



Tips and advice

As well as recommending a suitable treatment, you can provide information and advice to help people with haemorrhoids feel more comfortable and help prevent future problems.

Comforting advice

- Wash the bottom with unperfumed soap after each bowel movement, then dry thoroughly by gently patting with a soft towel
- Wear loose, cotton underwear instead of synthetic fibres to keep the area as dry as possible
- Avoid using talcum powder.

Piles prevention¹

- Eat lots of high-fibre foods – for example, brown rice, wholemeal bread, vegetables and fruit
- Minimise foods that can cause constipation – for example, refined and processed foods like cakes and biscuits
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water
- Avoid, or cut down on caffeine and alcohol
- Exercise regularly – this can help prevent constipation, reduce your blood pressure, and help you lose weight
- Do not delay going to the loo – ignoring the urge to empty your bowels can make your stools harder and drier.

Reference: 1. NHC Choices. Haemorrhoids (piles). March 2016. Accessible at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/piles-haemorrhoids/>. Last accessed April 2018.

2. NICE CKS. Haemorrhoids. July 2016. Accessible at <https://cks.nice.org.uk/haemorrhoids>. Last accessed April 2018. **3.** CH&D Own Research, March 2018.

Anusol™ is formulated for the treatment of haemorrhoids (piles). The Anusol™ range includes: Anusol™ Cream, Anusol™ Ointment, Anusol™ Suppositories, Anusol™ Soothing Relief Suppositories, Anusol™ Soothing Relief Ointment. Always read the label.