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PERSPECTIVE

Toilet Scrolling: A Predisposing Factor for Haemorrhoids?

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Abstract

Scrolling smartphones while sitting on the toilet is believed to be one of the reasons predisposing to haemorrhoidal disease. Not much is written about the problem of the use of smartphones and the development of haemorrhoidal disease in the literature, but the rising incidence of haemorrhoids globally does require guidelines to be set for toilet hygiene, especially in the young generation to prevent this issue from becoming an epidemic in future. It may be time to designate the washroom as a smartphone-free zone.

Keywords: Toilet scrolling, Haemorrhoidal disease, Smartphone Free Zone, Smartphone addiction

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While the incidence of haemorrhoids is on the rise in countries like Australia, Israel, and Korea, India is also contributing significantly to the case list with 50% of the population predicted to have had symptoms of haemorrhoids at some point in their life at 50 years of age, and approximately 5% of the population suffer from haemorrhoids at any given point of time [1]. Apart from a sedentary lifestyle leading to chronic constipation, the role of sitting for a prolonged period in the washroom with a smartphone performing 'toilet scrolling' needs to be investigated and highlighted in the etiopathogenesis of haemorrhoids.

Toilet scrolling is a global issue with studies revealing that 79.8% of respondents from Spain take their smartphone to the loo followed by Poland, the USA, Lithuania, and Canada [2]. This survey also revealed that while Canadians like to play games with their smartphones while sitting in the washroom, Americans prefer to chat or call people while in the toilet. The French divide the bathroom phone time between social media scrolling, gaming, and reading the news. A recent study found that 90% of residents of Hong Kong take their smartphones to the toilet and 61.1% toilet -scrolling of social media [3]. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were the primary focus of scrolling for 61.6% of respondents during their toilet time.

The two important health concerns of toilet scrolling are the development of haemorrhoids due to prolonged sitting in the washroom and the touchscreen becoming a potential source of contamination for bacterial infection. Smartphones are regarded as "mosquitoes of the digital age" as they carry ten times more germs than toilet seats [4]. A study

conducted by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and Queen Mary, University of London concluded that 1 in 6 smartphones was contaminated with faecal matter [5]. But another surgical problem that is lurking behind is the formation of haemorrhoids because of prolonged sitting in the washroom due to toilet scrolling.

A recent study did find a linear association between the time spent on the toilet and the degree of haemorrhoids [6], but not much literature has predicted the dark side of toilet scrolling associated with the grades of haemorrhoids. Toilet reading habits were evaluated in the general population from Israel and it was found to involve 52.7% of the population and these people had an increased incidence of haemorrhoids, though it was not statistically significant [7]. Though chronic constipation and straining at defecation are important etiological factors, the use of cell phones during defecation diverts one's attention from the so-called "Nature's call" and thus affects the normal anal synergy of the defecatory reflex. It may be graded as a part of attention disorder. A psychological angle of "cell phone addiction" may also be contributory.

It is well established that haemorrhoids develop when the supporting tissues of the anal cushions disintegrate or deteriorate resulting in an abnormal downward displacement of the anal cushions resulting in dilatation of the veins. Though the amount of toilet time and pressure required to initiate this pathology is still not established, the incidence of haemorrhoidal disease was found to be higher in the patients using a bidet (Western) toilet compared to those using a squat (Indian) toilet, which could be attributed to the longer toilet sitting periods

in the bidet toilet and scrolling on the mobiles [8]. 10 minutes has been the maximum recommended time to be spent in the toilet according to various non-peer-reviewed data available as there are no hard-core evidence-based retrospective or prospective studies in this matter [9]. Smartphone addiction has been associated with teenage anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness which might indirectly lead to spending more time sitting in the toilet for scrolling in solitude.

With the prevalence of haemorrhoidal disease estimated to be around 20.8 to 38.2% by colonoscopy findings [10], it is extremely important to declare the washroom as a 'Smartphone Free Zone' and all types of mobile scrolling to be discouraged right from the school days. Toilet training and toilet hygiene should make it mandatory for all to avoid mobiles inside the washroom. To prevent the future generation from developing various grades of haemorrhoids, a timer or alarm has to be set for spending a maximum of 10 minutes inside the washroom. Until and unless strict guidelines and health regulations on the use of smartphones in the washroom are made with lifestyle modifications, we may be encountering an epidemic of bleeding per rectum in the future.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declares that they do not have conflict of interest.

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