Rectal bleeding

If you or a family member ever has bleeding from your anus (back passage or bottom), it is important to see your doctor as soon as possible. You may need blood tests, faecal testing, a digital rectal examination, or a colonoscopy (see colonoscopy info sheet), or CT scan.

Symptoms

**Bright red blood** may be seen only on toilet paper or in the toilet bowl after a bowel movement – not mixed freely with the bowel motion. This type of bleeding is usually caused by haemorrhoids (piles) or anal fissure.

- A haemorrhoid is a swollen vein inside the rectum. (see haemorrhoid info sheet)
- A fissure is a split in the lining of the anus. (see anal fissure info sheet)
- Both can be caused by constipation, and may cause difficult and painful bowel movements.

**Blood mixed into the bowel movement** can mean disease further in from the anus and it may indicate an inflamed rectum or colon (large intestine or bowel). This type of bleeding can be caused by a serious condition, and you may have other symptoms as well. Other symptoms may include: sharp anal pain, mucus and pus in the bowel motions, constipation, abdominal pain, cramping, fever, diarrhoea, tiredness and being unusually pale – which may be a sign of anaemia (low blood count).

Blood mixed into the bowel motion may also indicate bowel cancer. Bowel cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in New Zealand. (see Bowel cancer info)

Polyps may be found before the cancer develops. Polyps are small growths from the inner lining of the colon. They may cause minor bleeding. (see polyps brochure)

**Maroon or black blood** is usually caused by bleeding higher in the gut.

- Bleeding ulcers in the stomach or high in the small intestine cause black or tarry bowel motions.
- Overuse of alcohol, aspirin or other anti-inflammatory medication can cause bleeding higher in the gut.
- Iron pills cause black bowel motions but don’t cause bleeding.

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