

## 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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