



# Rectal problems

The rectum is the lowest part of the large bowel (colon). The opening of the rectum is the anus. Stool is passed from the anus.



## SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Rectal pain
- Rectal bleeding
- Anal itching
- Redness, swelling, or a rash in the rectal area

## TREATMENT

Treatment for rectal problems depends on the cause. Any sign of rectal bleeding should be evaluated by a doctor. This includes blood on toilet paper. Colorectal cancer should be checked for, despite the person's age or family history of this disease.

## CAUSES

### **Anal / Rectal Pain and/or Bleeding**

- Constipation. Straining to pass stool. Hemorrhoids.
- Anal fissures. These are splits or tears in the skin around the anus.
- Polyps or small growths
- Injury due to anal intercourse or the insertion of a foreign object
- Blockage in the intestines
- Colorectal cancer

### **Anal / Rectal Itching**

Often there is no clear cause. Persons with diabetes are more prone to rectal itching.

- Dry skin. Products that irritate or cause a skin allergy in the anal area. Examples are over-the-counter anesthetic ointments that end in "caine," such as benzocaine.
- Hemorrhoids
- Long-term diarrhea
- Psoriasis. This is a chronic skin disease. With this, itchy, scaly red patches form on a part of the body.
- Pinworms. These are intestinal parasites. The anal itching is at night and can be painful.
- A yeast infection



## TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Do you have any of these problems?

- Bright red blood in the stools (not just on toilet paper) with dizziness, nausea and vomiting, shortness of breath, and/or severe abdominal pain, cramps, and swelling
- Rectal bleeding is heavy or dark maroon or black in color.
- Rape or sexual abuse has occurred.
- A foreign object is not able to be removed from the rectum.

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



Are any of these problems present, especially in a child?

- Small (1/4 to 1/2 inch) white worms in the stools or around the anal area
- Pain and itching at night
- Acting irritable. Restless sleep.

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **CALL DOCTOR**



Does rectal bleeding occur with any of these conditions?

- Sudden onset of severe and constant pain and a purple-colored hemorrhoid that bleeds easily
- Bright red blood after an injury, intercourse, or having something put up the rectum
- Between bowel movements
- After taking a new medicine or returning from another country

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **SEE DOCTOR**



Do rectal pain and/or itching still bother you after using self-care?

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **CALL DOCTOR**



**USE SELF-CARE**



Does rectal pain occur with any of these problems?

- The pain is severe or lasts longer than a few days.
- Anal spasms occur after passing stool.
- Diarrhea or mucus discharge
- Swelling or itching in the anal area

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **SEE DOCTOR**

**CONTINUE IN NEXT COLUMN**





## SELF-CARE / PREVENTION

Limiting these items may help with anal / rectal itching:

- Caffeine
- Carbonated drinks
- Citrus fruits and tomatoes
- Chocolate
- Alcohol
- Spicy foods

### Anal / Rectal Bleeding

- Don't lift heavy things.
- Stop taking anti-inflammatory medicines and/or aspirin (unless prescribed and monitored by your doctor).
- Don't strain to pass stool.

### Anal / Rectal Itching

- Practice good hygiene. Clean the rectal area daily.
- Use an over-the-counter ointment, such as one with zinc oxide or one for hemorrhoids, such as Preparation H. Follow package directions. Capsaicin topical cream may also be used.
- Wear clothes and undergarments that fit loosely.
- Take a warm bath or sitz bath. A sitz bath is a shallow, warm water bath. You can get a sitz bath device from a medical supply company and some drug stores. Then dry the rectal area well.
- Take warm tub baths.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- If you have diabetes, keep blood sugar levels in a healthy range.

### Pinworms

- Check for pinworms in this way: In a dark room, a few hours after bedtime, shine a flashlight on the anus. Pinworms, if present, will go back into the anus when the flashlight is shined on them.
- Wash the hands often.
- Keep fingernails closely trimmed.
- Try to get your child to not suck their thumb and not bite their nails.
- Wash underwear and bed linen in hot soapy water.
- If medication for pinworms is prescribed or recommended by your doctor, use it as directed.
- If your child is infected with pinworms, it may be recommended that all of their caregivers to be treated at the same time to reduce the risk of reinfection.

### Rectal Pain

- Take warm baths.
- Use a warm water sitz bath for 15 minutes, 2 to 3 times a day.
- Put towels soaked in warm water on the anal area. Or, apply a cold compress to the painful area, if this helps with the pain.
- Don't strain to pass stool.
- Use soft, plain, unscented, two-ply toilet paper. Take your own toilet paper to work or other places that may use harsh paper. Use wet, not dry, toilet paper, if that helps.
- Use an over-the-counter wipe, such as Tucks, after using toilet paper.
- Don't sit for long periods of time. When you do sit, raise your legs, as often as you can.
- If needed, take an over-the-counter medicine for pain as directed.