Rectal Bleeding

A Common Problem That Needs Medical Care
What Is Rectal Bleeding?
Rectal bleeding is when blood passes through your rectum and anus. It can occur with or without a bowel movement. Rectal bleeding may be a sign of a serious problem in the rectum, colon, or upper GI tract. Call your doctor right away if you have any rectal bleeding.

Common Symptoms
Rectal bleeding may occur before or after a bowel movement. You may also have symptoms such as:
- Rectal pain, itching, or soreness
- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhea with blood clots
Rectal bleeding can also occur without pain.

Causes of Rectal Bleeding
Some common causes of rectal bleeding include:
- Hemorrhoids (swollen veins in the anus)
- Fissures (tears in or near the anus)
- Diverticulosis (pockets in the colon wall)
- Ulcers in the upper GI tract and inflammation of the large intestine
- Abnormal tissue growths (tumors or polyps) in the GI tract
- A bulging rectum (also called a rectal prolapse)
- Abnormal blood vessels in the small intestine or in the colon
The GI Tract
The gastrointestinal (GI) tract includes the mouth, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine (colon), rectum, and anus. When you eat, food is digested as it passes through your GI tract. Solid waste is removed through the rectum.

Rectal Bleeding and GI Problems
The cause of rectal bleeding may be found in any region of the GI tract. The colon or rectum may be the site of your bleeding problem. Or, bleeding may be due to problems further up the GI tract, such as in the small intestine, duodenum, or stomach.
Your Evaluation and Treatment

Your doctor will do a medical evaluation to find the site and cause of your bleeding. He or she will ask about your health and examine you. Certain procedures may also be done to help confirm the diagnosis and plan your treatment.

Health History and Physical Exam

Your doctor will ask you about your health and symptoms. You may be asked if your rectal bleeding has been treated before. Your anus will be checked for pain or tenderness. Your doctor may gently insert a special tube in your anus to view the rectum.

As part of your evaluation, a colonoscopy may be done.
Special Tests You May Have

A sample of your stool will be checked for blood. Any of these procedures may also be done:

- **A sigmoidoscopy** to examine your rectum and sigmoid colon using a lighted tube. Most often, sedating (relaxing) medication is not needed.

- **A colonoscopy** to look at your colon and rectum. You may be given medication through an IV (intravenous) line to help you relax.

- **A barium enema** to view your colon. A chalky liquid containing barium is passed through the rectum and into the colon. This liquid enhances the x-ray images taken of your colon.

- **An upper endoscopy** to check your esophagus, stomach, and upper small intestine. This procedure is used in cases of severe rectal bleeding.

Your Treatment Plan

Your treatment depends on the cause of your rectal bleeding. Your doctor will make a plan that’s right for you. Sometimes, rectal bleeding stops on its own. If it does, be sure to still see your doctor to check that the problem wasn’t serious. Always follow your doctor’s advice.
What You Can Do

Follow all your doctor’s instructions. And keep working with him or her after your treatment. You may need follow-up visits. If rectal bleeding recurs, it may be a sign of the same or another health problem. Be sure to see your doctor right away.