

View this article online at: patient.in/digestive-health/rectal-bleeding-blood-in-faeces/rectal-bleeding-in-children

Rectal bleeding in children

Rectal bleeding means bleeding from the back passage. Rectal bleeding in children can cause a great deal of anxiety but most children with rectal bleeding do not have any serious underlying problem.

How common is rectal bleeding in children?

Rectal bleeding in children is not very common and is less common than in [adults](#). It is not known exactly how common it is.

When to worry about rectal bleeding

Most of the time, rectal bleeding is not caused by a serious condition but the only way to be sure is to see a health professional so that any cause of the rectal bleeding can be diagnosed and treated.

What causes rectal bleeding in children?

The likely causes in children vary with age. The most common causes are not very serious (for example, anal fissure). But rectal bleeding can sometimes be caused by serious conditions.

The possible causes include:

Anal fissure

This occurs in babies and children of all ages and is usually caused by passing a large or hard stool. The blood in the stools is bright red and the fissure is usually painful. The fissure can be seen and no tests are usually needed. Most fissures get better with no treatment or by just keeping the stools soft. [See also the separate leaflet called Anal Fissure.](#)

Twisting of the gut (volvulus)

A volvulus occurs when a loop of bowel twists around itself. This can interfere with the blood supply to the bowel and cause a blockage in the bowel. This can occur in babies and infants. As well as rectal bleeding, there may be sickness (vomiting) and swelling of the tummy (abdomen). [See also the separate leaflet called Intussusception and Volvulus in Children.](#)

Part of the gut folds over itself (this is called intussusception)

This occurs most often in infants aged between 5 and 7 months. There are frequent episodes of tummy pain with vomiting and swelling of the tummy.

Bowel polyps

[Bowel polyps](#) usually cause painless repeated bleeding.

Meckel's diverticulitis

A Meckel's diverticulum is a bulge in the wall of the gut that is present at birth. It is the most common congenital abnormality of the bowel. Inflammation of the diverticulum (diverticulitis) may cause rectal bleeding. This is more common in children aged younger than 2 years. It is more common in boys.

Inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis)

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is a term used for two long-term conditions that cause inflammation of the gut (digestive tract). See also the leaflets on [Crohn's Disease](#) and [Ulcerative Colitis](#).

Gastroenteritis

[Gastroenteritis](#) is an infection of the gut (intestines) that can cause diarrhoea and vomiting, but may also cause other symptoms such as tummy pain or rectal bleeding.

Rarer causes of rectal bleeding

Necrotising enterocolitis

[Necrotising enterocolitis](#) is a very serious condition in which some of the tissue in the gut becomes inflamed and dies. This is very rare but occurs in newborn babies, usually at 3-10 days of age.

Sexual abuse

This may present with rectal bleeding.

Hirschsprung's enterocolitis

[Hirschsprung's disease](#) is a rare condition which affects the nerve cells of the gut. This causes a blockage in the gut. Enterocolitis means an infection of the large bowel (colon) and this can be a serious complication of Hirschsprung's disease.

Rectal ulcer

This means an ulcer in the lining of the rectum at the lower end of the bowel.

Abnormalities of the blood vessels in the gut

These include a range of lesions called haemangiomas, arteriovenous malformations and angiodysplasias. These can be difficult to diagnose even with newer investigation methods.

Henoch-Schönlein purpura

[Henoch-Schönlein purpura](#) is a condition that causes the small blood vessels in the skin, joints, gut (intestines) and kidneys to become inflamed and bleed.

Haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS)

This is a condition caused by the abnormal breakdown of red blood cells. HUS is a serious condition that can cause abnormal bleeding (including rectal bleeding) as well as life-threatening kidney failure.

Low blood platelets (thrombocytopenia)

Thrombocytopenia means you have a low blood platelet count. Platelets (thrombocytes) are cells in the blood that help the blood to clot by clumping and forming plugs in blood vessel injuries. Therefore a low platelet count may cause abnormal bleeding, such as rectal bleeding.

Cause of rectal bleeding in older children and teenagers

For teenagers, the possible causes are more similar to the causes of [rectal bleeding in adults](#). Lower gastrointestinal bleeding is most often caused by:

- Anal fissures.
- [Piles \(haemorrhoids\)](#).

- Bowel polyps.
- Gastroenteritis.
- Crohn's disease.
- Ulcerative colitis.

Rectal bleeding in children symptoms

Bright red blood means that the bleeding is in the lower part of the gut (bowel). Blood from higher up in the bowel gets partly broken down to make the stools very dark red or black (this is called melaena). Bleeding from the stomach may cause bringing up (vomiting) of blood (haematemesis).

The age of your child and other symptoms (such as tummy pain, swelling of the tummy, constipation or diarrhoea) will help your doctor to find the cause of the rectal bleeding.

Does rectal bleeding come and go?

Rectal bleeding can be very variable in severity and may be present all the time or may come and go. Even if the bleeding is just small amounts of blood and does come and go, it is still very important to see a health professional to get it checked out.

What tests can be done?

Most children with rectal bleeding don't need any tests. If needed, the initial tests will include blood tests and also a stool test. X-rays and scans - ultrasound, computerised tomography (CT) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) - may be needed and your child may need a colonoscopy in hospital under general anaesthetic.

Rectal bleeding in children treatment

The diagnosis and treatment will depend on the underlying cause and how much bleeding there is. For most children with minor rectal bleeding, the cause is harmless and the bleeding stops without any treatment.

If the cause of the bleeding is not obvious and may be serious then your child will usually be referred to a children's specialist (paediatrician) or a bowel specialist. Occasionally the bleeding is severe and needs emergency hospital treatment.

What is the outlook?

The outlook (prognosis) depends on the underlying cause of the rectal bleeding. Most cases of rectal bleeding in children are not serious and get better without any treatment.

Further reading

- [Kessmann J](#); Hirschsprung's disease: diagnosis and management. *Am Fam Physician*. 2006 Oct 15;74(8):1319-22.
- [Sagar J, Kumar V, Shah DK](#); Meckel's diverticulum: a systematic review. *J R Soc Med*. 2006 Oct;99(10):501-5.
- [Jiang J, Jiang B, Parashar U, et al](#); Childhood intussusception: a literature review. *PLoS One*. 2013 Jul 22;8(7):e68482. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0068482. Print 2013.
- [Balachandran B, Singhi S](#); Emergency management of lower gastrointestinal bleed in children. *Indian J Pediatr*. 2013 Mar;80(3):219-25. doi: 10.1007/s12098-012-0955-x. Epub 2013 Jan 25.

Disclaimer: This article is for information only and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions. Egton Medical Information Systems Limited has used all reasonable care in compiling the information but makes no warranty as to its accuracy. Consult a doctor or other healthcare professional for diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions. For details see our [conditions](#).

Authored by: Dr Colin Tidy, MRCP	Peer Reviewed by: Dr Hayley Willacy, FRCGP	
Originally Published: 19/11/2023	Next review date: 19/11/2022	Document ID: doc_29481

View this article online at: patient.in/digestive-health/rectal-bleeding-blood-in-faeces/rectal-bleeding-in-children

Discuss Rectal bleeding in children and find more trusted resources at [Patient](#).



To find out more visit www.patientaccess.com
or download the app



Follow us

