

# Gastrointestinal Bleed

You'll hear us refer to this as a GI Bleed. This is any bleeding that starts anywhere from the mouth to the large bowel. Bleeding can range from a small amount to a large amount. The larger amount of bleeding there is, the more likely you are to become quite sick.

There are two types of GI bleeds:

- + **Upper GI bleed:** This is any bleeding from the throat to the bottom of the stomach.
- + **Lower GI bleed:** This is any bleeding from the bottom of the stomach to the end of the lower bowel or rectum.

## HOW DO I KNOW WHEN I HAVE A BLEED?

The blood is digested as it moves through your digestive tract. The longer it takes to move through, the less it will look like blood. That's because it is only partly digested. Stool will look black and tarry when the bleeding is blood from the stomach. Blood that has moved quickly through the digestive tract may appear red or dark red in the stool.

Sometimes you may find a small amount of bright red blood on the surface of the stool or found on the toilet paper. This happens when the lining of the rectum has been irritated. This could be from an anal fissure or hemorrhoids.

You might also get this after lots of diarrhea or straining with a bowel movement. This is not

serious if there is only a small amount of blood and if the bleeding stops. Home treatment usually will be all that is needed.

## HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AT HOME

Once at home, it is important to follow these instructions, and take any medicines that are prescribed for you.

### Things to stay away from:

- + Non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen – can irritate your stomach and erode the lining of your gut, and can also thin your blood.
- + Alcohol – can damage your liver, thin your blood, and also irritate your stomach.
- + Smoking – can damage the lining of your throat and stomach.
- + Avoid caffeine – can increase the amount of acid produced by the stomach. Examples: coffee, tea, cola drinks, chocolate, and other foods and drinks containing caffeine. Decaffeinated coffee has the same effect on the stomach as caffeinated coffee, so stay away from decaf as well.

### Things to reduce your risk of a bleed:

- + Eat small meals more frequently.
- + Check with your pharmacist before taking any over the counter medicines.
- + Reduce your stress. The greater the stress, the greater the risk.

## WHEN TO GET HELP

**Go to the nearest Emergency Department** or **see your family doctor** if you are experiencing any of the following:

- + Stools are black and tarry.
- + Stools are bright red or dark red.

**Note:** Some foods and medicines can also change the look of the stool and it is normal. If you take bismuth subsalicylate (such as PeptoBismol) or iron tablets, your stool may look black. If you eat lots of beets, your stool may turn red.

If you are older than age 50, talk with your doctor any time you have new rectal bleeding or notice blood on your stools. You may need further tests to rule out a more serious problem.

## TO LEARN MORE ASK

- + Your family doctor.
- + HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf or hard of hearing) or go online to [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca)

## RECOMMENDED FOLLOW UP

- Follow up with your primary care provider in \_\_\_ days.

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Find this information sheet on the BC Emergency Medicine Network website:

[www.bcemn.ca/clinical\\_resource/gastrointestinal-bleed/](http://www.bcemn.ca/clinical_resource/gastrointestinal-bleed/)