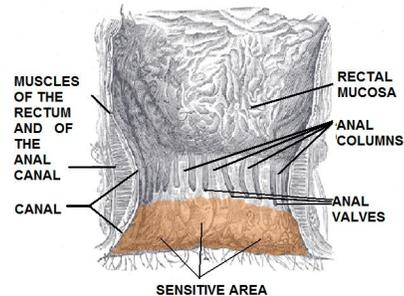


BLEEDING WITH THE PASSAGE OF STOOLS

Bleeding during the passing of stools is quite a common complaint. Unfortunately, all such bleeding is termed "piles" by the populace and what is even more worrying, gets treated at home by various local and home remedies WITHOUT THE BENEFIT OF A THOROUGH CLINICAL EXAMINATION.

Bleeding per rectum (PR), can for a start be associated with pain or be painless. It is important to know your body. The rectum and the last 3 centimetres, which is called the "anal canal", is lined by an internal covering which is not sensitive to pain in the upper part and a lowermost part which is so sensitive to touch (coloured), that it can distinguish between air, liquid and solids quite easily. (Hence our ability to pass wind knowing full well that no liquid or solid will egress).



Therefore, anything above this line will cause painless bleeding; anything below will cause pain sometimes quite intense.

BLEEDING PER RECTUM ASSOCIATED WITH PAIN

This is usually caused by any condition within the area that has been coloured. The commonest cause is a condition called a "**fissure**", which is a cut or tear in the anal canal caused by the passage of very hard stool. The anal canal has a limit to its elasticity and is passing very hard and large faeces (stool), the anal canal rips at its sensitive part causing pain and bleeding. (Refer to the presentation – "**(Know your body)**").

The condition can cause intense pain and spasm of the strong muscles around the anal canal. This can lead to a further narrowing of the size of the passage. This causes a vicious cycle of "pain causing narrowing causing more pain and so on".

Treated early this condition can often be cured without recourse to surgery. However, if the condition is allowed to linger, it ends up in a chronic state, with hardening of the edges of the fissure and a permanent narrowing of the anal muscles. When the condition reaches this stage, surgery is usually warranted.

Some ulcers at this area have a far more sinister origin like tumours. These have to be recognized and treated early.

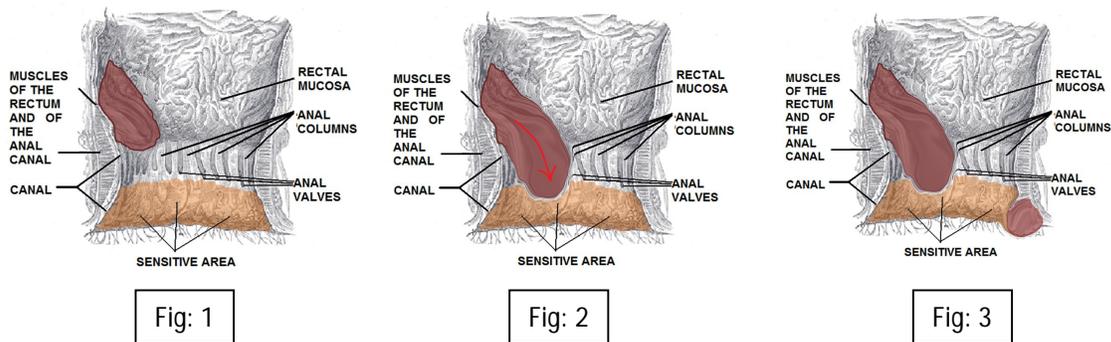
BLEEDING PER RECTUM NOT ASSOCIATED WITH PAIN

Any condition that lies above the sensitive area causes painless bleeding.

This bleeding can be horrifyingly bright red and odourless, splashing the commode and turning it bright red. The cause of this bleeding usually lies in the upper insensitive anal canal or even the lower rectum. One of the commonest causes is "**Piles**". If you do think about it, we are normally continent of wind and fluid with the anal canal. Therefore to achieve this perfect continence and to avoid an untoward leak, the body is blessed with some anal cushions, which seal whatever gap there exists when the anal circular muscles stay comfortably closed. You will realize that the anal muscles

do not have to be fiercely contracted in the normal resting state. In a condition where a person is used to straining continuously at attempts to clear ones bowel, taking inordinately long times to do so, these anal cushions become large and cause piles^(Fig 1). When the condition progresses, the anchorage of the anal cushions begin to elongate and the pile masses can now begin to slip out. This is the “tax” one pays for spending too much time at passing stool.

Piles can stay inside the anal canal and cause bleeding, they can protrude out during the act of passing stool and go back spontaneously, or protrude out and have to be replaced by the person^(Fig 2) or finally protrude out and stay protruded out despite best attempts. During this stage, piles can cause pain. Usually, the earlier stages are free from pain. Further straining causes external anal cushions to also become larger and one has at this stage external piles^(Fig 3).



Treatment of piles can be by “potty training” i.e; not to sit for long and not to strain at passing stool and by exercises for the very early piles. For more advanced conditions the treatment options are treatment by injections, banding or freezing and for more progressive lesions treatment should be by operation. This procedure can be done by the traditional “open’ operation or by a “stapling gun” which makes the operation relatively painless as it is carried out in the zone which is less sensitive to touch. However, to avoid the ignominy of having the “piles’ come back after treatment, proper “potty” habits, avoiding constipation and exercises are a must.

Other causes of bright red bleeding exists and it is mandatory for someone with any bleeding per rectum to get themselves completely and thoroughly examined.

The bleeding can also be slightly dark, brown or quite dark associated with a typically “stale fishy” odour. This usually signifies that the bleeding is from a source that is higher up. These conditions must also be completely and thoroughly investigated as sometimes they are early signs of sinister diseases. The doctor will take a thorough history, do a complete examination which will include a rectal examination and advise for appropriate tests. Sometimes there are grape-like lesions called polyps which hang down and may be removed during the investigation of colonoscopy (this test involves putting a flexible tube with a camera up the anal passage and rectum). The lesion is always sent for biopsy as an appropriate follow-up treatment may be needed. There are of course other causes of altered old blood passing per rectum but any of the following causes can result in bright red bleed if the amount of bleed is large. The commoner causes are inflammation of the colon, i.e.: various types of colitis both infective and non-infective, diverticulosis, where the inner lining is pushed out between the layers of muscle like a pouch, usually caused by long standing constipation and more sinister causes like cancer of the rectum and colon. Early appropriate treatment is usually adequate. Unfortunately, a number of people delay seeking advice for various reasons.