



QUESTIONS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ANSWERS

Gastrointestinal Bleeding

What is the Gastrointestinal (GI for short) tract?

The GI tract has an **upper** and a **lower** part.

The upper part includes the:

- mouth
- throat
- tube that carries food from the mouth down to the stomach (esophagus)
- small intestine (gut)

The lower part includes the:

- large intestine
- rectum
- These 2 parts carry unused food and waste out of the body.

GI bleeding can mean there is bleeding anywhere in the upper or lower tract. The amount of bleeding can be very small or very large.

Signs of GI Bleeding

Get care right away if you have any of these signs.

- throwing up (vomiting) blood
- vomit that looks like coffee grounds
- dark, tar-like BM (bowel movement)
- feeling lightheaded and dizzy
- sweating and pale skin
- feeling weak and short of breath

Causes of GI Bleeding

- Ulcers are the most common cause.
- a personal history of:
 - nose bleeds
 - Crohn's disease
 - an inflamed large intestine (colitis)
- a family history of GI bleeding
- some jobs (Ask your doctor if your job puts you at risk.)
- drinking too much alcohol
- belly surgery
- bacteria in poor water and unclean food
- having teeth pulled
- bruises
- medicines such as aspirin, steroids, and blood thinners (Coumadin)
- pouches in the lining of the intestine (diverticulosis)
- small non-cancer growths in the colon (polyps)
- hemorrhoids
- cancer

Medicines and GI Bleeding

People with GI bleeding should ask their doctor **before** using any of these medicines:

- aspirin
- arthritis medicines
- pain killers including:
 - Motrin
 - Advil
 - Ibuprofen
 - Naprosyn
 - Celebrex
- blood thinners like Coumadin and Plavix.

Tests for GI Bleeding:

Below is a list of tests doctors do to find the reason for GI bleeding. You do not have to read about all of them. Ask your doctor which one you will have. Then just read about that one.

- **Barium Swallow.** In this test you swallow barium, a white chalky drink. It is thick like a milk shake. The barium makes it easy to see

shapes on an X-ray machine. It lets doctors see if anything is wrong with the mouth and throat.

- **Upper GI series.** Doctors use an X-ray machine to watch the barium go down the throat, stomach and small intestine. The doctor looks for signs of bleeding.
- **Small bowel series.** You swallow the barium drink. The doctor uses an X-ray machine to watch it move even farther down the small intestine. This test can take from 3 to 6 hours.
- **Barium enema.** This test checks for bleeding in the lower intestine. It lets the doctor see even more than the small bowel series. The doctor places a tube into your rectum. The tube runs to a bag filled with barium. The barium goes into your intestine. Doctors watch the barium on an X-ray screen and look for problems.
- **Upper GI Endoscopy.** The doctor uses a long, thin tube with a tiny video camera and a light. It is passed down your throat. The doctor can see the inside of the throat, stomach, and the first part of the small intestine.
- **Proctosigmoidoscopy.** (proc-tow-sig-moid-os-co-py) The doctor looks at the rectum and lower intestine with this test. A thin, tube-like device with a light and a lens is used. It is placed inside the rectum. The device may also be able to take a tissue sample. The doctor can look at the sample later under a microscope.
- **Colonoscopy.** The doctor will use a long, thin bendable device that has a camera . It is placed in the rectum. It is used to look at the lower and middle intestine. The doctor can see any problems on a TV-like monitor. Tissue samples can be taken and any growths, called polyps, can be taken out. Any bleeding can be seen. A colonoscopy is also the best way to find early colon cancer.
- **Stool sample.** This test looks at BM samples for blood. In this test, samples from three BMs are taken. The samples are sent to a lab for testing.

Treatments

Your doctor may suggest treatments including:

- medication
- surgery
- changes in what you eat
- more rest
- reducing stress
- stop smoking
- do not drink alcohol

Who to Call for More Help:

American Gastroenterological Association (AGA)

4930 Del Ray Avenue
Bethesda, Maryland 20814
Phone: 301-654-2055
Fax: 301-654-9520

How can I find a Doctor?

St. Vincent Charity Hospital has doctors who have special training in gastrointestinal problems. To contact one of our doctors call the:

Physician Referral Line at 1-800-223-8662

Visit our Web site at www.stvincentcharity.com

Our doctors serve with a deep respect for all. Their goal is to give the best care and education whether or not a person can pay.

St. Vincent Charity Hospital

2351 E. 22nd Street
Cleveland, Ohio 44115
216-861-6200
TTY: Ohio Relay 1-800-750-075

St. Luke's Health Care Center

11201 Shaker Boulevard
Cleveland, Ohio 44104
216-721-6900

Reading Health, a program of Project:LEARN, assisted in the writing of this material under a grant from the Sisters of Charity Foundation: June 2008



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