



Dr Lee Hock Bee

Gastrointestinal Bleeding

Read on to learn more!

The sight of blood in your stools can be a frightening sight. If you have this condition, see your doctor immediately to check out the cause of the bleeding. A recent survey carried out during the World Digestive Health Day 2013 (WDHD 2013) roadshow revealed approximately 10% of roadshow visitors experienced blood in stools.

Gastrointestinal bleeding and its causes

The causes of blood in stool may range from harmless, annoying conditions of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract such as haemorrhoids to serious conditions such as cancer. There may be cases when the amount of blood is so minute that it can only be detected by a faecal occult test.

Bleeding in the upper GI tract

This includes the oesophagus, stomach, and duodenum. Bleeding from any of these parts causes black or tarry stools. You may also vomit bright red blood, dark clots, or coffee-grounds-like vomits.

Some of the causes include abnormal blood vessels (angiodysplasia), peptic ulcer, bleeding stomach or duodenal ulcer, and gastritis (inflammation of the stomach lining).

Bleeding in the lower GI tract

This includes the large intestine, rectum, and anus. If any of this is the source of bleeding, your stools will be either bright red or maroon to indicate fresh blood or old blood respectively. The causes may be due to haemorrhoids, colon polyps or colon cancer, diverticulosis, intestinal infections, small bowel tumour, inflammatory bowel disease, or ulcerative colitis.

Other reasons for black stools

Your diet can also affect the colour of your stool. If you eat black liquorice, lead, iron pills, certain medicines or blueberries, your stools may be black

in colour. Eating beets and tomatoes may give your stools a reddish colour. However, if you have eliminated these foods from your diet and your stools are still black or red, go for a medical check-up immediately.

Evaluating your condition

It is important that you get a doctor to evaluate your condition if you discover blood in your stool. There are several tests that may need to be run in order to diagnose your condition, namely endoscopy, colonoscopy, enteroscopy, x-rays of the abdomen, nuclear scanning and angiography, radionuclide imaging, and laparotomy.

Associated symptoms and treatment

In addition to the bleeding, you should also inform your doctor of any other symptoms that may be present. Give all the details to help your doctor diagnose your condition and to locate the cause of the bleeding.

Do not forget to consult your doctor for more information and always go for regular medical check-ups. In addition, you should make it a habit to take preventive steps such as increasing your fibre intake and consuming probiotics which are good for your digestive health. Leading a healthy and active lifestyle will also improve your digestive health and boost your immune system.

You may also have black stool after eating black liquorice (as shown below).



Dr Lee Hock Bee is a Gastrointestinal Surgeon and member of Digestive Health Advisory Board. The author is not associated with and does not endorse any brands or products. For free digestive health info guides or more information, please contact 03-5632 3301.