

Proctitis

Definition & Facts

What is proctitis?

Proctitis is [inflammation](#) of the lining of your [rectum](#). Depending on the cause, proctitis may happen suddenly and last a short time or may be long lasting.

Who is more likely to develop proctitis?

You are more likely to develop proctitis if you have

- engaged in anal sex with a person infected with a [sexually transmitted disease](#) (STD)
- infections such as STDs and [foodborne illnesses](#)
- an [inflammatory bowel disease](#) such as [ulcerative colitis](#) or [Crohn's disease](#)
- had [radiation therapy](#) to your pelvic area or lower [abdomen](#), due to certain types of cancers
- injured your [anus](#) or rectum
- taken certain [antibiotics](#)

Men are more likely than women to get acute proctitis. Adults are more likely than children to get acute proctitis.¹

What are the complications of proctitis?

If your proctitis isn't treated or doesn't respond to treatment, you may have complications, including

- abscesses—painful, swollen, pus-filled areas caused by infection
- chronic or severe bleeding that can lead to [anemia](#)
- fistulas—an abnormal passage, or tunnel, between two organs or between an organ and the outside of the body
- rectal stricture—an abnormal narrowing of your rectum
- ulcers—sores in the lining of your [intestines](#)

References

[1] Irizarry L. Acute proctitis. Medscape website. emedicine.medscape.com . Updated April 4, 2014. Accessed July 6, 2016.

Symptoms & Causes

What are the symptoms of proctitis?

The most common symptom of proctitis is tenesmus—an uncomfortable, frequent urge to have a [bowel movement](#). Other symptoms of proctitis may include

- discharge of mucus or pus from your rectum
- a feeling of fullness in your rectum
- pain in your anus or rectum
- pain during bowel movements
- cramping in your abdomen
- pain on the left side of your abdomen
- bleeding from your rectum
- bloody bowel movements
- [diarrhea](#)
- [constipation](#)
- [swollen lymph nodes](#) in your groin

If you are [HIV](#) -positive and have proctitis caused by [genital herpes](#) , your symptoms may be worse.

What causes proctitis?

A number of things may cause proctitis.

Infections

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) can cause proctitis if you have had anal sex with a person infected with an STD. Common STD infections that can cause proctitis include

- [gonorrhea](#)
- [chlamydia](#)
- [syphilis](#)
- genital herpes

Infections associated with [foodborne illness](#), such as *Salmonella*, *Shigella*, and *Campylobacter* infections, can also cause proctitis.

Children with [strep throat](#) may sometimes get proctitis. They may infect the skin around their anus while cleaning the area after using the toilet or by scratching with hands that have strep

bacteria from their mouth or nose. The bacteria may cause [inflammation of the anus](#) . Strep bacteria that get into the rectum may cause proctitis.

Inflammatory bowel disease

Two types of [inflammatory bowel disease](#)—[ulcerative colitis](#) and [Crohn's disease](#)—may cause proctitis. Ulcerative colitis causes inflammation and [ulcers](#) in the [large intestine](#). Crohn's disease causes inflammation and irritation of any part of the digestive tract—most often in the end of the [small intestine](#). However, ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease can also affect the rectum and cause proctitis.

Radiation therapy

If you have had [radiation therapy](#) in your pelvic area or lower abdomen due to certain cancers, you may develop a condition that is similar to proctitis, called radiation proctopathy or radiation proctitis. This condition is different because the intestinal lining does not become inflamed. Up to 75 percent of patients develop radiation proctitis following pelvic radiation therapy.²

Injury to the anus or rectum

Injury to your anus or rectum from anal sex or from putting objects or substances—including [enemas](#)—into your anus or rectum can cause proctitis.

Certain antibiotics

Use of certain [antibiotics](#) can lead to an infection that can cause proctitis in some people. Antibiotics are medicines that kill [bacteria](#). Even though antibiotics are meant to kill infection-causing bacteria, some antibiotics can kill good bacteria that normally live in your digestive tract. The loss of good bacteria may let a harmful bacterium called *Clostridium difficile* , or *C. difficile*, grow in the [colon](#) and rectum. *C. difficile* causes proctitis when it infects the lining of the rectum. Antibiotics that can kill good bacteria, leading to *C. difficile* infection, include

- [clindamycin](#)
- those, such as [cephalosporins](#) , that treat a wide range of bacterial infections
- any penicillin-based antibiotic such as [amoxicillin](#)

References

[2] Grodsky MB, Sidani SM. Radiation proctopathy. *Clinics in Colon and Rectal Surgery*. 2015;28(2):103–111.

Diagnosis

How do doctors diagnose proctitis?

Your doctor diagnoses proctitis based on your medical history, a physical exam, lab tests, and medical procedures.

What tests and procedures do doctors use to diagnose proctitis?

Lab tests

Your doctor may perform one or more of the following lab tests to diagnose proctitis.

- [blood test](#). A health care professional may take a blood sample of your blood and send the sample to a lab to test. A blood test can show signs of certain conditions and diseases that can cause proctitis, such as STDs and other infections.
- [rectal culture](#) . A rectal culture can show signs of infections that cause proctitis.
- [stool test](#). A stool test can show signs of bleeding from the rectum and signs of infections that cause proctitis.

Medical procedures

Your doctor may perform one or more of the following medical procedures to diagnose proctitis. Your doctor can also diagnose some causes of proctitis, such as [Crohn's disease](#) and [ulcerative colitis](#), and some [complications of proctitis](#) with these procedures.

- [colonoscopy](#)
- [flexible sigmoidoscopy](#)
- proctoscopy—a procedure to look inside the rectum and anus using a [proctoscope](#)

Treatment

How do doctors treat proctitis?

Treatment of proctitis depends on its cause and the severity of your symptoms.

Proctitis caused by infection

If lab tests confirm that your proctitis is due to an [infection](#), your doctor will prescribe medicine based on the type of infection. A doctor may prescribe

- [antibiotics](#) to treat [bacterial](#) infections such as [sexually transmitted diseases](#) and [foodborne illnesses](#)

- antiviral medicines to treat [viral](#) infections such as [genital herpes](#)

If lab tests confirm that your proctitis is due to an infection, your doctor will prescribe medicine based on the type of infection.

Proctitis caused by inflammatory bowel disease

When inflammatory bowel disease such as [Crohn's disease](#) or [ulcerative colitis](#) causes proctitis, the goals of treatment are to decrease the [inflammation](#) in your [intestines](#), prevent flare-ups of your symptoms, and keep you in [remission](#). Your doctor may prescribe one of the following medicines:

Aminosalicylates. These medicines contain 5-aminosalicylic acid (5-ASA), which helps control inflammation. Aminosalicylates include

- [balsalazide](#)
- [mesalamine](#)
- [olsalazine](#)
- [sulfasalazine](#)

Corticosteroids. Corticosteroids, also known as steroids, help reduce the activity of your [immune system](#). Corticosteroids include

- [budesonide](#)
- [hydrocortisone](#)
- [methylprednisolone](#)
- [prednisone](#)

Immunomodulators. These medicines reduce immune system activity, resulting in less inflammation in your digestive tract. Immunomodulators include

- [6-mercaptopurine](#)
- [azathioprine](#)
- [cyclosporine](#)
- [methotrexate](#)

Proctitis caused by radiation therapy

Doctors treat symptoms caused by radiation therapy in your pelvic area based on the severity of your symptoms. If you have mild symptoms, such as occasional bleeding or [tenesmus](#), your proctitis may heal without treatment. Your doctor may prescribe medicines such as [sucralfate](#) (Carafate) or [corticosteroid enemas](#) to ease your pain and reduce symptoms.

Proctitis caused by injury to your anus or rectum

When injury to your [anus](#) or [rectum](#) is the cause of your proctitis, you should stop the activity causing the injury. Healing most often occurs in 4 to 6 weeks. Your doctor may recommend antidiarrheal medicines and pain relievers.

Proctitis caused by certain antibiotics

When the use of [certain antibiotics](#) results in *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*) infection and causes your proctitis, your doctor will stop the antibiotic that triggered the *C. difficile* infection. He or she will prescribe a different antibiotic such as [metronidazole](#) (Flagyl), [vancomycin](#) (Vancocin), or [fidaxomicin](#) (Dificid).

How can I prevent proctitis?

Doctors don't know how to prevent all types of proctitis. To prevent STD-related proctitis you should

- use a condom during anal sex
- don't have sex with anyone who has any symptoms of an STD, such as pain or burning sensation during urination or discharge from the penis
- reduce your number of sex partners

If injury to your anus or rectum caused your proctitis, stopping the activity that caused the injury often will stop the inflammation and keep proctitis from coming back.

How do doctors treat the complications of proctitis?

If you have continual or severe bleeding, your doctor may use [colonoscopy](#) or [flexible sigmoidoscopy](#) to perform procedures that destroy rectal tissues to stop the bleeding. These procedures include

- thermal therapy, which uses a heat probe, an electric current, or a laser
- cryoablation, which uses extremely cold temperatures

A surgeon may perform surgery to treat [other complications of proctitis](#), such as abscesses, fistulas, rectal stricture, and ulcers in your intestine. Your doctor may recommend surgery to remove your rectum when other medical treatments fail, the side effects of medicines threaten your health, or your complications are severe.

Eating, Diet, & Nutrition

How can my diet help reduce symptoms of proctitis?

Depending on the cause of your proctitis, changing your diet can help reduce symptoms.

Your doctor may recommend that you eat more foods that are high in [fiber](#). Eating [foods](#) that are high in fiber can make [stools](#) softer and easier to pass and can help prevent [constipation](#). A doctor or [dietitian](#) can help you learn how to add more high-fiber foods to your diet.

If your proctitis is caused by [ulcerative colitis](#) or [Crohn's disease](#), a high-fiber diet may make symptoms worse. If you have ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease, talk with your doctor about what foods are right for you.

If you have [diarrhea](#), you may need to avoid certain foods that can make diarrhea worse:

- caffeine
- fructose, a sugar found in fruits, fruit juices, and honey and added to many foods and soft drinks as a sweetener called high-fructose corn syrup
- lactose, a sugar found in milk and milk products
- sugar alcohols, sweeteners used in food products that are labeled “sugar-free”

Talk with your doctor before changing your diet.

Your doctor may recommend nutritional supplements or vitamins that can help reduce some proctitis symptoms:

- [omega-3 fatty acids](#)
- [probiotics](#)
- [vitamin C](#)
- [vitamin E](#)

For safety reasons, talk with your doctor before using [dietary supplements](#) or any other [complementary or alternative](#) medicines or medical practices.

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