

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ACUTE GASTROINTESTINAL BLEEDING

What Is Gastrointestinal Bleeding?

Gastrointestinal bleeding (GIB) is bleeding that occurs anywhere along the digestive tract from your esophagus to your anus. It can range in severity from mild to severe.

GIB is a common cause of office and emergency department visits and may require hospitalization. Most causes of GIB are curable or controllable, but some may be life-threatening if they are left untreated.



What Are the Signs and Symptoms?

- Vomiting bright red or dark brown blood indicates bleeding in the upper digestive tract.
- Black or tarry stool or stool that contains dark or bright red blood indicates bleeding in the upper or lower digestive tract.
- Fatigue, sluggishness, paleness, and shortness of breath over time may be an indication of chronic bleeding (light or intermittent bleeding that continues for a long time).
- Acute, heavy bleeding may lead to dizziness or faintness, shortness of breath, abdominal pain, and shock.

How Are Patients With GIB Evaluated?

- All patients with bleeding should undergo a rapid assessment that includes a history, a physical examination, and blood tests.
- You will be asked about any use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications (like ibuprofen), antiplatelet agents (like aspirin), and blood thinners (like warfarin) and any prior GIB.
- Your blood pressure and pulse will be measured while you are lying down and while you are standing.
- Your stool may be checked for blood.

How Are Patients With GIB Treated?

Treatment will depend on the suspected cause and severity of bleeding but may include:

- Placement of intravenous catheters (IVs) for medications, fluids, and possibly blood transfusions
- Washing out of the stomach
- Early consultation with a gastroenterologist
- Endoscopy or angiography to locate the source of the bleeding inside the digestive tract and to stop the bleeding
- Colonoscopy to find the source of lower digestive tract bleeding

Interventional radiology or, rarely, surgery may be needed if these interventions do not work. Your doctor will try to prevent future bleeding by treating the condition that is causing the bleeding.

Questions for My Doctor

- What steps can I take to prevent GIB?
- If I notice GIB, should I be evaluated urgently?
- What happens if the source of the bleeding is not identified?
- When is it safe for me to restart my aspirin or blood thinners after an episode of bleeding?
- What is my risk for bleeding again?

For More Information



Mayo Clinic

www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/gastrointestinal-bleeding/symptoms-causes/syc-20372729

MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/gastrointestinalbleeding.html>