

# Proctitis

Proctitis is an inflammation of the lining of the rectum. It has many causes, but sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are the most common. Although proctitis is more common if you are having sex, it is possible to get it even if you have never had sex.

Proctitis can often be cured with antibiotics.

## Causes

Proctitis is most often caused by sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and herpes simplex virus that are passed through receptive anal sexual contact. This includes both penetrative sex and sexual activities where there is an exchange of body fluids or skin-to-skin contact. You can also get these infections by sharing sex toys. If you have one of these infections, you can pass it to others even if you don't have symptoms.

Proctitis may also be a side effect of medical treatments like radiation therapy and medications, or it may be related to conditions that cause inflammation such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease. Other causes include rectal injury, surgery, infections that are not sexually transmitted, and food allergies.

## Symptoms

The most common symptom of proctitis is a frequent or continuous urge to have a bowel movement, along with pain and cramping, even when there is little or no stool.

Other symptoms may include:

- mucous or blood in stools
- abnormal anal discharge or bleeding
- rectal or anal bumps, sores, blisters or redness
- pain in the rectum or anus

## Tests and Diagnosis

Testing for proctitis is usually done with an exam and a swab. If there are symptoms such as diarrhea, abdominal cramping or fever, a stool sample may be tested for other bacteria or parasites.

It is best to get tested for proctitis if you have symptoms or have a partner who has been diagnosed with proctitis.

## Treatment

Proctitis is treated with prescription antibiotics. It is important to take all your medications as directed. If you miss any doses, the infection may not be cured. See your health care provider if this happens, or if you still have symptoms a week after starting treatment.

It is important to not have sex (even with a condom) for a week after starting treatment. If you do have sex during this time, you could pass an STI to your sexual partners or get it again. If this happens, talk to your health care provider.

## Sexual Partners

Your sexual partners within the last two months should be tested and treated for STIs. If you haven't had sex in the last two months, your last partner should be tested and treated.

There are a few ways to tell partners. You can tell partners yourself or anonymously. Talk to your health care provider about what is right for you.

## Complications

If you treat proctitis early, there are usually no other health problems. If left untreated, proctitis can lead to serious complications including:

- narrowing of the anal canal or stricture
- anal fistula (an abnormal connection between the rectum and the skin around the anus)

## Prevention

It is a good idea to be tested regularly for STIs, especially if you have new sexual partners or open relationships. Talking with partners about safer sex makes sure everyone knows what to expect. Condoms are great if they work for you – the correct use of condoms reduces your chances of getting and passing STIs that cause proctitis.

## Resources

**SmartSexResource – If you are worried or have anxiety about proctitis**

<https://smartsexresource.com/topics/worry-and-anxiety>

**TransCareBC – Gender-affirming sexual and reproductive health information**

<http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/care-support/access-care/sexual-hlth>