SYMPTOM

Anal pain

Anal pain is discomfort felt in or around the opening of the bowel.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Sharp, burning, throbbing, or aching discomfort

WHERE IT IS FELT
In or around the anus

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Anal fissures, irritated hemorrhoids, constipation

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Severe pain with fever, pus, swelling, or feeling very unwell

USUALLY LASTS
Minutes to weeks, depending on the cause

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Pain persists, returns, or comes with bleeding

Overview

Anal pain is discomfort in or around the anus, where stool leaves the body. It may begin suddenly or build over time. It can occur during a bowel movement, continue afterward, or happen without passing stool.

Common causes include a small tear called an anal fissure, irritated hemorrhoids, and hard stool. However, severe or worsening pain can sometimes be caused by an infection that needs prompt treatment.

Healthcare professionals are used to discussing this symptom. Describing the pain, bleeding, swelling, bowel habits, and other symptoms can help identify the cause.

What it may feel or look like

Anal pain can feel sharp, burning, aching, or throbbing. You may notice:

Bright red blood may appear on toilet paper or coat the outside of stool. Heavy bleeding, black stool, or bleeding with faintness needs urgent assessment.

Tell a healthcare professional if pain started after anal sex, an injury, or inserting an object. This

helps them provide safe, appropriate care.

- Sharp pain while passing stool, sometimes lasting afterward
- Burning or soreness around the opening
- A tender lump or swelling
- Constant, deep, or throbbing pain
- Brief attacks of cramping pain
- Itching, mucus, pus, or bright red blood

Common causes

An anal fissure is a small tear in the lining of the anus, often caused by constipation or passing a large, hard stool. It typically causes sharp pain during a bowel movement, followed by burning pain. A small amount of bright red blood may be present.

Hemorrhoids , or piles, are swollen blood vessels in or around the anus. They may cause itching, bleeding, swelling, or discomfort. Internal hemorrhoids are often painless, but an external hemorrhoid can become very painful if a blood clot forms.

Constipation can cause pressure, soreness, fissures, or irritated hemorrhoids. Frequent diarrhea and repeated wiping can also inflame the skin.

Other possible causes include:

An anal abscess is a collection of pus caused by infection. It can produce constant, throbbing pain, swelling, fever, or drainage. Ongoing pain or bleeding can less commonly be related to a growth and should be assessed rather than assumed to be hemorrhoids.

- Skin irritation from moisture, fragranced products, or vigorous cleaning
- Muscle spasms in the pelvic floor or anus
- Inflammation of the rectum's lining
- Sexually transmitted infections affecting the anus or rectum
- Inflammatory bowel disease, such as Crohn's disease
- Injury, including from an inserted object

When to seek medical care

Seek same-day medical care for severe or rapidly worsening anal pain with fever, chills, pus,

increasing redness, swelling, or feeling very unwell. These features may indicate an abscess or another infection. Do not squeeze or try to drain a painful lump yourself.

Go to an emergency department or call emergency services if:

Do not try to remove a sharp or deeply lodged object yourself.

Book a routine appointment if pain lasts more than a few days, keeps returning, or interferes with bowel movements. Also seek assessment for repeated bleeding, an unexplained lump, ongoing discharge, changed bowel habits, or unintentional weight loss.

- Bleeding is heavy, does not stop, or includes large clots
- You feel faint, confused, very weak, or short of breath
- A sharp or breakable object is stuck in the rectum
- Severe pain follows a major injury

How the cause is found

A healthcare professional will ask when the pain began, what it feels like, and whether it is linked to bowel movements. They may ask about constipation, diarrhea, bleeding, discharge, fever, medicines, anal sex, injuries, and bowel conditions.

They may inspect the skin and gently examine inside with a gloved, lubricated finger. A short instrument called an anoscope may be used to view the anal canal. If the area is extremely painful, the examination may be limited or delayed.

Tests are not always needed. Swabs may be taken if infection is possible. Persistent bleeding or other concerning changes may require blood tests, imaging, or a camera examination of the bowel.

You can ask what each examination involves, request a chaperone, and ask the clinician to stop if you need a break.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the cause. For mild symptoms, reducing strain and irritation may help.

Keep stool soft by drinking enough fluid and gradually increasing fibre from vegetables, fruit, beans, and whole grains. Do not delay bowel movements or push for a long time. A pharmacist can advise whether a fibre supplement or stool-softening treatment is suitable.

A warm, shallow bath may relax the muscles and soothe soreness. Clean gently with water or

an unperfumed product, then pat dry. Avoid vigorous wiping, fragranced wipes, and scratching.

Simple pain relief may help if it is safe for you. Follow the label and ask a pharmacist if you have other health conditions, take regular medicines, or are unsure what to use.

A clinician may prescribe ointment for a fissure, treatment for infection or inflammation, or medicine for constipation. A painful clotted hemorrhoid sometimes needs a procedure. An abscess usually needs medical drainage; antibiotics like amoxicillin or doxycycline alone may not be enough.

What to expect

Minor irritation may improve within a few days. A fissure can take several weeks to heal, especially if stool remains hard. Brief muscle spasms may last seconds or minutes but can return.

Seek follow-up if treatment is not helping, pain worsens, or symptoms return. Recurrent abscesses or ongoing drainage may be caused by an anal fistula, an abnormal tunnel between the bowel and nearby skin. This usually needs specialist assessment.

Common questions

Can hemorrhoids cause severe pain?

Most internal hemorrhoids do not cause severe pain. An external hemorrhoid can be very painful if a clot develops. Severe pain with fever, pus, or spreading swelling needs same-day assessment because infection is possible.

Is bright red blood always serious?

A small amount can occur with a fissure or hemorrhoids, but persistent or repeated bleeding should be assessed. Heavy bleeding or bleeding with faintness is an emergency.

Should I avoid bowel movements while it hurts?

No. Delaying can make stool harder and increase pain. Keep stool soft and avoid straining.

Can anal pain be related to sex?

Yes. Friction, a small tear, injury, or infection can cause pain. Stop activities that worsen it and seek testing if a sexually transmitted infection is possible.

Sources

- NHS. Anal pain
- National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. Symptoms and Causes of Hemorrhoids
- American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons. Anal Fissure
- American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons. Abscess and Fistula Expanded Information
- NHS. Anal fissure