

Rectal examination

A rectal examination is when a doctor or nurse uses their finger to check for any problems inside your bottom (rectum or back passage). It's usually quick and you should not feel any pain.

When a rectal examination may be needed

A rectal examination is sometimes needed to investigate:

- bleeding from the bottom
- pain in the bottom
- constipation
- being unable to control when you go to the toilet (incontinence) – including bowel incontinence or urinary incontinence

Prostate problems

Men sometimes need a rectal examination to check for problems with the prostate.

The prostate is a small gland that only men have.

The prostate:

- produces fluid that mixes with sperm to create semen
- often gets larger with age
- may cause problems with how you pee and how often you need to go

Before having a rectal examination

Your doctor or nurse will explain what's going to happen and why you need a rectal examination.

Some people can feel embarrassed, but it's a common procedure.

Let your doctor or nurse know if:

- you'd prefer a man or woman to perform the examination
- you'd like someone else in the room – it could be a friend, family member or another doctor or nurse

- you have severe pain in your bottom – they may be able to use local anaesthetic to numb the area

What happens during a rectal examination

You'll need to undress from the waist down. If you're wearing a loose skirt, you can usually just remove your underwear.

Let the doctor or nurse know if you'd like to get changed behind a curtain or be alone in the room.

Your doctor or nurse will:

1. Ask you to lie down on your left side, with your knees lifted up towards your chest - this is the easiest position to examine your bottom.
2. Put on some gloves and look at the outside of your bottom for any problems.
3. Put some lubricating gel on 1 finger and gently slide it into your bottom - this should not be painful, but may be a little bit uncomfortable.
4. Sometimes ask you to squeeze your bottom around their finger so they can assess how well the muscles are working.

If you're a man, your doctor or nurse may press on your prostate. This can make you feel the urge to pee, but it should not hurt.

Once you're dressed, they'll discuss the results of the examination with you.

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