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Digital anorectal exam - DARE

A digital anorectal examination (DARE) is an examination of the anus and rectum. Your health care provider uses a gloved, lubricated finger to check for any abnormal findings in the anorectal area to help check for anal and rectal cancer as well as other conditions.

How the Test is Performed

The provider will look at the anus and perianal region (area around the anus) for hemorrhoids, fissures, or fistulae. Then your provider will put on a glove and insert a lubricated finger into the anal canal and rectum to palpate and feel for any suspicious irregularities. In women, this exam may be done at the same time as a pelvic exam.

How to Prepare for the Test

For the test, your provider will ask you to:

- Either lie on your side on an examination table or lean over an examination table
- Try to relax
- Take a deep breath during the insertion of the finger into your anus

How the Test will Feel

You may feel mild discomfort during this test.

Why the Test is Performed

This test can be done:

- To find the presence of any abnormalities such as polyps, or irregular lumps or masses in the anorectal region.
- For early diagnosis of cancer in people at high risk of anal cancer. This may include women with prior HPV infections, people with HIV, or people who have a weak immune system (immunocompromised) such as solid organ transplant recipients.

People with HIV who have anal symptoms should undergo DARE if they are:

- Men who have sex with men.
- Transgender women, who are below the age of 35.

- Others below the age of 45.

People under the age of 35 who show signs of anal cancer during DARE should undergo standard anoscopy to further investigate the findings.

People under the age of 35 who do not show signs of anal cancer during DARE should repeat the test in 1 year.

Adults with HIV should undergo annual screening for anal cancer regardless of symptoms, this includes:

- Men who have sex with men, who are age 35 and older.
- Transgender women who are age 35 and older.
- All other people with HIV ages 45 and older.

DARE may also be performed to check for recurrence of anal cancer after chemotherapy and radiation treatment is given.

Normal Results

A normal finding means your provider did not detect any problem during the exam. However, this test does not rule out all problems.

What Abnormal Results Mean

An abnormal result may be due to:

Pre-cancer (dysplasia) or invasive cancer in the perianal or anorectal region.

Several non-cancer abnormalities may be found such as:

- Benign growths such as polyps, skin tags, anal warts, or others
- Internal or external hemorrhoids
- Lesions or ulcers in the anorectal canal
- Anal fissures
- Anal fistulae
- Perianal abscesses
- Scarring from any previous anal or rectal surgery, etc.

Risks

DARE is safe with no major risks involved. Some people may feel mild pain or discomfort, or slight bleeding during the exam especially if they have hemorrhoids or fissures in the anal area.

Considerations

If you are planning to have an anal test for HPVs or sexually transmitted infections, consider it before undergoing DARE. The lubricant used during DARE may interfere with the test results.

Rarely, in people with severe anal pain, sedation or anesthesia may be given to perform the test.

Alternative Names

DARE

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