



Blood in the urine

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Blood in the urine (in medical terms 'haematuria') may be visible to you as a dark discoloration, or only detected by your doctor when the urine is tested as part of a thorough medical examination. Immigration checks, life insurance and employment medical examinations, and routine screening when in hospital for other reasons, are other common times for unsuspected blood in the urine to be detected.

Who can get blood in the urine?

Anyone at any age. The bleeding can range from heavy – even with clots, to undetectable to the naked eye. Depending on the cause, there may be other symptoms such as loin pain, burning on passage of urine, or passage of a kidney stone. It is very rare for anaemia (a low haemoglobin or 'blood count') to occur as a result of blood in the urine.

How do I know if there is blood in my urine?

The urine may look pink or red or there may be clots. Sometimes this may be accompanied by pain. The best way is for your doctor to test the urine for blood with a dip-stick or under the microscope.

Other things often lead to the urine looking dark and more rarely, red. Some medicines do turn the urine red. Red colouration in the urine may also come from pigments such as that in beetroot.

Although many things make urine look dark in colour, it is always worthwhile seeing your doctor if you think you've seen blood.

What does blood in the urine mean?

Providing there is no contamination by vaginal blood, blood in the urine always means there is a problem in your urinary tract, the kidneys, the ureters (tubes carrying urine from the kidneys to the bladder), the bladder or the urethra (which carries urine to the outside).

What sort of problems?

The most common would be bladder infection, nephritis (inflammation in the kidneys' filters), kidney stones and tumours. All of these can be treated and in all cases, the shorter the time between discovering blood in the or urine and determining the cause, the greater the likelihood that treatment will be effective.

What will my doctor do?

The doctor will first confirm that blood is present using a dip stick and probably sending a sample to the laboratory. This will also determine if infection is present. Careful examination of a fresh urine sample under the microscope can help the doctor tell whether the blood cells are coming from the kidney filters or elsewhere in the urinary tract. Together with any symptoms, this will be a guide to further tests.

What could these tests include?

Often an ultrasound or x-ray of the urinary tract will be performed. These tests will determine if stones, tumours or previous kidney damage could have been responsible. This could lead to other tests such as a cystoscopy – checking in the bladder using a telescopic instrument. You would normally be asked to see a urologist for further discussion.

In some cases where the kidney filtration mechanism is the cause of bleeding, a needle biopsy of one kidney (renal biopsy) might be recommended. You would be asked to see a renal physician for advice on this.