

Ask the Colorectal Expert Q&A



Topic: [Colon and Rectal](#)
(surgeries/cancer/treatment)

Expert: [Justin Maykel, MD](#)

Justin Maykel, MD, is chief of colon and rectal surgery at UMass Memorial Medical Center and assistant professor of surgery, at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

Are you over 50? Or are you over 40 with a family history of colorectal cancer?

If the answer to either question is yes, you owe it to yourself to get screened. At UMass Memorial Health Care, our fellowship-trained colorectal surgeons, gastrointestinal specialists and oncologists offer a range of diagnostic and treatment options, no matter what your colorectal symptoms or issues are.

Our surgeons have pioneered some of the most advanced minimally invasive surgeries and provide comprehensive surgical options for all colorectal diseases.

Have a question about colorectal screening or cancer?

[Submit your questions for Dr. Maykel today!](#)

Answers will be posted in our Ask the Expert Q&A Forum below within 48 hours.

Q. I get bleeding from time to time with itching. Does this sound like hemorrhoids or something more serious?

Q. Should I be concerned about on & off black stools?

A. Black or bloody stools are not normal. They could be due to a variety of causes including hemorrhoids or even colorectal cancer. It is one of the key symptoms that deserve evaluation and should be brought to the attention of your Primary Care doctor.

A simple evaluation can determine the cause and provide treatment options. Other concerning symptoms that should be mentioned include weight loss, changes in bowel habits (diarrhea/constipation), and persisting abdominal pain.

Q. *Why are my hemorrhoids still hurting? I can't go to the bathroom like I used to.*

A. Hemorrhoids tend to be a chronic (or long-term) condition. Most commonly, patients complain of swelling and pain, bleeding, tissue prolapse (sliding out), and mucous drainage. The over-the-counter remedies like Preparation H help soothe some of the symptoms but do not cure the hemorrhoids.

Maintaining soft regular bowels by supplementing with fiber every day helps prevent flares. Plenty of procedures exist to cure the hemorrhoids including banding and surgery. We offer new, less-invasive options even compared to 5 years ago.

Following surgery, most patients are so pleased that they say they should have had the surgery years ago!

Q. *I've had crohn's disease for 14 years and just lost my fiancé suddenly. Would that account for abnormally high labs such as wbc, c-reactive protein and sed rate?*

A. We're very sorry for your loss. Stress can absolutely be a trigger for Crohn's flares. Of course this particular flare deserves an evaluation by your treating physician who might need to make some adjustments to your medications.

The lab values that you list could be elevated for other reasons as well and are not 100% specific to Crohn's disease.

Q. I am 82 years old, is a colonoscopy really required?

A. If you have never had a screening colonoscopy before then yes, it is recommended even if you are in your 80s. If you have had a colonoscopy in the past, then often the decision to repeat the test once you are over 80 is made on an individualized basis.

If this is the case for you, it would be best to discuss the idea with your primary care doctor.

Q. I have really bad constipation. I've been impacted before, but it's happening again and I don't think I can go through this again. There is mucus coming out and the stool just won't drop down. Please help!

A. Constipation (a condition in which you have uncomfortable or infrequent bowel movements, usually with small amounts of dry, hard stool less than three times a week) is the most common gastrointestinal complaint: upwards of 4 million people have frequent constipation.

Constipation is the result of too much water being absorbed from waste that is moving too slowly along the process in your colon (large intestine). Many things can cause the colon to move too slowly, such as a lack of fiber or fluids in the diet; lack of exercise; certain medications; pregnancy; ignoring the urge to have a bowel movement; even changes in habit like travel.

Symptoms can include difficult or painful bowel movements, as you've described, or feeling bloated, uncomfortable and sluggish.

Because you've experienced severe constipation before and you are in considerable discomfort, I recommend you talk to your primary care doctor right away about having an evaluation by a gastroenterologist.

A diet high in insoluble fiber—whole grains, cereals, certain fruits and vegetables—can help prevent constipation, as can reducing consumption of processed foods and meats. [Click here](#) for more information about high-fiber diets.