

Family Medicine Clerkship: Plain Language Summary

Is blood in my urine dangerous?

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Who?

- *Who should worry about blood in their urine?*

Some people are more at risk for having dangerous causes of blood in their urine. The most dangerous cause of blood in the urine is cancer. Smokers and people who have worked with chemicals (like dyes) can get cancers that first show up as blood in their urine. People who are older than 40 can also get these cancers. People who have had problems with their kidneys or bladder should be concerned if they have blood in their urine.

What?

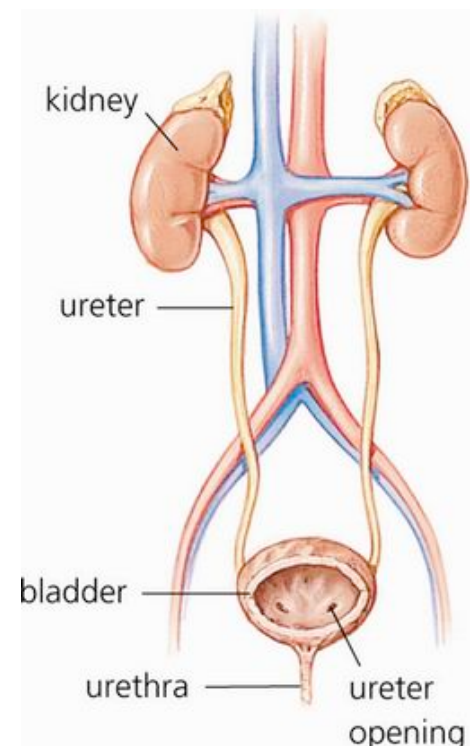
- *What tests are used when there is blood in my urine?*

Blood in the urine is called hematuria. *Hema-* for blood and *-turia* for urine. The first step is to have you pee in a cup. The urine is looked at under a microscope and analyzed for signs of infection, stones, and cancer (see *Why?* below). For most people, the work-up will stop there and the doctor will give an antibiotic or possibly some dietary changes. Some people may be sent to have X-rays of their belly to look for signs of stones or cancer. Some may be sent to have a camera look around in their bladder to make sure there is no cancer growing. This is called cystoscopy and it is a safe and useful test. Cystoscopy can be uncomfortable but the camera is small and the doctor gives numbing medication. Some people like this test because they can see the inside of their bladder on the TV screen.

Where?

- *Where does the blood come from?*

Blood in your urine can come from anywhere along the urinary tract. The urinary tract starts in the kidneys (most people have 2 kidneys). The kidneys make urine and send the urine to your bladder through tubes called ureters. The urine is stored in the bladder until you are ready to pee. When you go to the bathroom, the urine leaves your bladder and heads out of your body through another tube called the urethra. Both men and women have a urethra, but men's are longer. Blood in the urine can come from the kidneys, the ureters, the bladder, the urethra, and from the outside of the body.



Why?

- *Why would I be bleeding?*

There are many reasons why you could have blood in your urine. The most common cause is an infection. Kidney stones can also cause bleeding. Some athletes when they exercise strenuously can find blood in their urine. Women can mistake bleeding from their vagina as blood in their urine. These are all simple causes of blood in the urine that can be easily treated. The concern is that cancer can also cause bleeding. A cancer causing blood in the urine can be growing anywhere along the urinary tract (see *Where?* above). Bladder cancer is of particular concern because bleeding is often the earliest sign and bladder cancer can be dangerous.

When?

- *When should I see my doctor?*

Everyone with blood in their urine should see their primary care doctor. With a few questions and some easy and non-invasive tests, your doctor can help figure out why you have blood in your urine. For those at high risk for cancer, seeing your doctor earlier can make cancer treatment easier and safer.

How?

- *How can I research blood in my urine on my own?*

Bladder Cancer: Mayo Clinic

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/bladder-cancer/DS00177>

Bladder Cancer Health Center: WebMd

<http://www.webmd.com/cancer/bladder-cancer/default.htm>

Bladder Cancer: MedlinePlus

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/bladdercancer.html>

5 Key Words

- blood in urine
- bladder cancer
- cystoscopy
- urinary tract
- hematuria