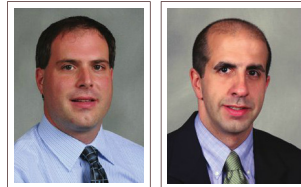


Microscopic Hematuria, or Blood in the Urine

Although it can be unnerving to see specks of blood in your urine, or urine that has a red or pink color, this is not always a sign of serious disease. However, because an abnormal amount of blood in your urine (called “hematuria”) can in some cases point to a larger, underlying ailment, it is important that you consult your urologist to determine what the cause is.



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When blood clearly can be seen in urine, the condition is called “gross hematuria.” When there is an abnormal number of blood cells that can only be seen under a microscope, the condition is called “microscopic hematuria.” Usually, microscopic hematuria is discovered only when your doctor analyzes a urine sample (called a “urinalysis”).

Causes of microscopic hematuria that aren’t linked to disease can be divided into three categories. First, there are physical reasons, such as strenuous exercise (leading to either a damaged bladder or dehydration) or trauma (a blow to the kidneys, for instance). Second, it can be a side effect of certain medications, either over-the-counter drugs (laxatives, aspirin) or prescriptions (including certain antibiotics, cancer drugs, and antiepileptics). Third, in women microscopic hematuria can be a result of menstrual blood in the urine.

Typically in benign cases, hematuria clears up on its own. If the condition is prolonged, it may be a sign of a disorder in your urinary tract—your kidneys, ureters, prostate gland (in men), bladder, and/or urethra. Urinary tract illnesses that lead to microscopic hematuria include urinary tract infections (UTIs), sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), kidney stones, kidney disease, an enlarged prostate gland (called “benign prostatic hyperplasia” or BPH), prostate infection (prostatitis), and cancer of the bladder, prostate, or kidney.

Early detection of serious disease increases the chance of a good prognosis, and doctors recommend that anyone older than 40 who experiences hematuria should have a thorough evaluation to determine the cause and to make sure no cancer is present in the urinary system. Men older than 50 who have hematuria should be checked for prostate cancer.

It is possible that no discernible cause will be found for your microscopic hematuria. In that case, you might be diagnosed with “idiopathic hematuria.”

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TESTING

If your doctor wants to check for hematuria, he or she might perform the “dipstick test,” sampling your urine with a chemically treated strip. If your bleeding was first discovered through urinalysis, you will be asked for another sample, to check if an abnormal amount of blood is still present. If so, your urine might be further analyzed for the presence of minerals (a possible sign of kidney stones), bacteria, or cancer cells.

Other tests your urologist might perform if microscopic hematuria is discovered are:

Cystoscopy

A visual inspection of your urinary tract with a fiber-optic instrument inserted into the urethra (the tube through which urine passes out of your body).

Imaging tests

Computerized Tomography (CT) or Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scans might be taken to give accurate views of your kidneys and bladder.