Dear Alice,

While reading a pamphlet that came with anti-diarrheals, I noticed it said to contact a doctor if there is either blood or mucus in the stool. The blood I understand, but mucus? What would that look like, where does it come from, why wouldn't it digest, what would it mean, and why would there be cause for concern?

Thanks,
Possibly Concerned

Answer

Dear Possibly Concerned,

Mucus usually comes to mind when thinking about having a cold or allergies. But mucus in stool? Yes, it's possible — and can even be normal! Though typically unnoticed, mucus is naturally produced in the intestines to keep the colon lining moist and lubricated. What's more, it's normal for increased amounts of mucus to accompany short-term diarrhea or constipation. However, beyond those circumstances, there are times where an excess of mucus may mean some medical attention is in order.

If you notice an increased amount of mucus making its way out with fecal matter, it can be indicative of something more serious. If it's also associated with bouts of diarrhea, it may be due to a gastrointestinal infection. Mucus in stool may also be a sign of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Moreover, bowel movements that contain mucus accompanied by blood may be a sign of inflammatory bowel diseases, such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis, or even potentially cancer.
No matter the cause though, if a more than normal amount of mucus is observed, it’s wise to take note of any changes seen in stools or related bathroom habits. It’s also a good idea to think about when the changes first occurred and how long they’ve lasted. If a more serious condition is suspected, having this information handy will be a helpful tool to bring along to visit with a health care provider. It can also help them determine the best course of action for addressing bowel-related concerns moving forward.

It may seem strange to see an increased amount of mucus in a place where folks wouldn't normally expect it, but eventually (if it happens to you), you'll get to the bottom of it.

Alice!

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Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service. If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

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