

Proctalgia Fugax

Episodic rectal pain caused by spasm of the levator ani muscle

What is it?

Proctalgia fugax (fleeting pain in the rectum) and Coccydynia (pain in the coccygeal region) are variants of the levator syndrome. It occurs in both men and women. The pain is typically unrelated to having a bowel movement. It may be related to sitting, or it may occur spontaneously. It can even awaken the patient from sleep. The pain is often described as a vague ache high in the rectum. The pain may feel as if it would be relieved by the passage of gas or a bowel movement and usually subsides spontaneously within a few minutes. In severe cases, the pain can persist for many hours. The patient may have undergone various rectal operations for these symptoms, with no benefit. Low back or prostate disorders may cause similar symptoms.

How is it Diagnosed?

Physical examination can be used to exclude other painful rectal conditions (e.g., hemorrhoids, fissures, and abscesses). Physical examinations are often normal, although tenderness or tightness of the levator muscle, usually on the left, may be found. Anoscopy and often sigmoidoscopy are used to exclude a cancerous condition.

What are the treatments?

The patient is reassured regarding the benign nature of the condition. Warm baths, a mild analgesic and the regulation of bowel movements with a high fiber diet and fiber supplements may be beneficial. When the symptoms are more intense, skeletal muscle relaxants, Kegal exercises and other remedies are prescribed.

PATIENT INFORMATION

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