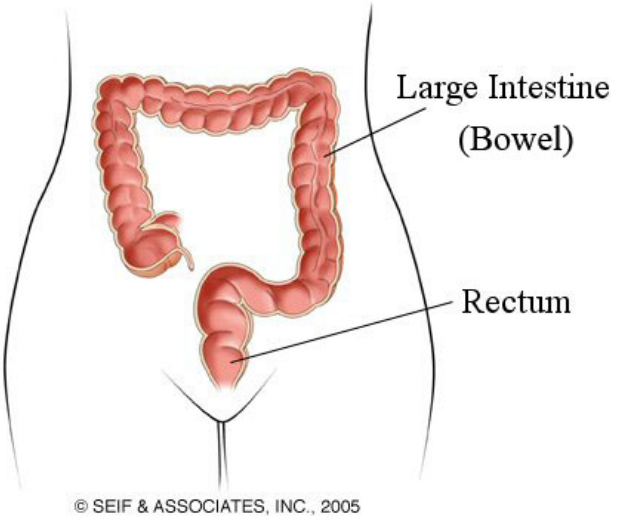
Rectal Prolapse, Children

Prolapse means the falling down, bulging, dropping, or drooping of a part. In rectal prolapse, loose tissue near the end of the large intestine (*rectum*) slides downward and may bulge through the anus. A caregiver may see a reddish mass protruding from your child's anus. In this condition it protrudes commonly after a bowel movement during toilet training. The bowel tissue may appear inflamed, have mucus and bleed slightly, but children usually do not have pain. Rectal prolapse commonly occurs between age 1-5 years. It is often first noticed after a child begins walking. In most cases the cause is ever identified.



In children rectal prolapse is usually partial. This means that only the lining of the rectum (*mucosal membrane*) extends outside the body through the anus. Mucosal prolapse is most common in children younger than age two. It occurs in normal infants and is usually short lived.

CAUSES

In children, it can be an early sign of cystic fibrosis or it can be due to other problems. Prolapse may occur in the following conditions:

- Constipation.
- Diarrhea.
- Malnutrition and malabsorption (celiac disease is an example).
- Pinworms.
- Injury to the anus or pelvic area.
- Inflammatory bowel disease (Chron's or ulcerative colitis).
- Congenital problems such as a spinal chord problem at birth (*meningocele*).

DIAGNOSIS

In addition to a physical exam, your doctor may perform some tests to rule out any of the previously mentioned possible causes.

TREATMENT

- In children, rectal prolapse usually responds to conservative treatment. This may include:
  - Pushing the prolapse back in. The protruding bowel must be pushed back into the rectum. As this may reoccur your doctor may teach you how to do this yourself or tell you to return if the prolapse reoccurs.
  - Giving your child a stool softener.
- Prolapse usually is cured with treatment of the underlying condition. Underlying conditions may include:
  - Constipation.
  - Pinworms.
- If prolapse reoccurs, but no underlying condition is identified, prolapse usually stops around age 4-5 when anal sphincter tone develops more fully.
- Surgical treatment may be needed if conservative treatment does not cure the problem.

PROGNOSIS

- Curing rectal prolapse involves early treatment and getting rid of underlying causes of prolapse.
- Usually a diet that treats constipation will cure rectal prolapse in young children.
- Infants and children usually recover completely without difficulties.

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