

Surgery Clerkship Program

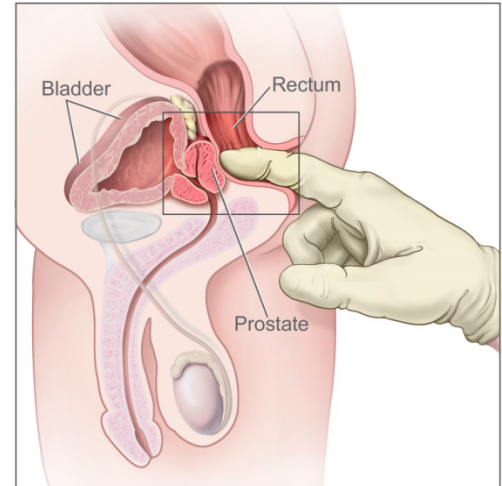
Department of Surgery

NYU Langone Medical Center

THE DIGITAL RECTAL EXAMINATION (DRE)

Digital rectal examination is an important part of the physical exam that allows assessment of:

- Fissures
- Hemorrhoids
- Rectal masses
- Prostatic hypertrophy
- Prostate masses
- Sphincter tone
- Carcinomatosis (aka Blumer's shelf)
- Fecal Occult Blood



Procedure

The digital rectal exam should generally be performed in the fetal position (i.e. lateral decubitus with the knees pulled up.) The jack-knife position (i.e. standing, bending over) is reserved for specialty clinics such as rectal clinic or urology clinic, and is not appropriate for an initial exam.

The DRE can be a source of anxiety for the patient, so it is important that the physician clearly communicates each step of the rectal exam. After putting on gloves, the first step is a visual inspection of the anus. Next, the physician applies SurgiLube to the index finger, and slowly inserts it into the rectum. It is important to rotate the finger fully in both directions to assess all 360° of the rectum. The physician should note the sphincter tone, the size and contour of the prostate in men, and should check for any masses.

Fecal Occult Blood Testing

The material on the gloved finger is then applied to both windows on the Hemocult card. The card is then flipped over, and the developer window is opened. Drops of the developer solution should be applied to both windows and the control strip. Any blue staining in the windows is considered positive for fecal blood.

