

To make an appointment or ask a question, call the Division of Colon and Rectal Surgery at **617-636-6190**.

For urgent problems, call the Tufts Medical Center operator at **617-636-5000** and ask for the on-call physician for Colon and Rectal Surgery.

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ated with levator ani syndrome is usually felt higher in the rectum or pelvis than proctalgia fugax and lasts longer, typically greater than 20 minutes and up to many hours. It may appear to be coming from the rectum or from the pelvic floor muscles. It is described as a dull ache or pressure sensation. It may be worse when sitting and better when standing or lying down.

In some individuals, a “trigger point” or spot in the pelvic floor muscles where the pain seems to be localized can be identified during digital rectal examination.

Medications such as antispasmodics, muscle relaxants or pain relievers (taken either under the tongue, by mouth or as suppositories) may be tried. Warm tub baths, warm (not hot) heating pads or ice packs are often helpful. Physical therapy with pelvic floor massage, biofeedback training, or electrogalvonic (specialized electrical) stimulation of the pelvic muscles may also be of benefit.

#### POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- ▶ Make the correct diagnosis
- ▶ Rule out other causes
- ▶ Education and reassurance are important
- ▶ Treat the symptoms

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# Functional Anorectal Pain

## FUGAX & LEVATOR ANI SYNDROME

### *Symptoms and Treatment*

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***Pain in the anus or rectum is very common. Most anorectal pain is caused by easily identified problems such as hemorrhoids, fissures, abscesses, inflammatory conditions, prostatitis, cystitis, or cancer.***

Occasionally, pain may be recurrent and persistent but no clear cause can be found. This is called “functional” pain. Most functional anorectal pain can be categorized as either proctalgia fugax or levator ani syndrome. As many as 10-20% of people may experience this type of pain at one time or another, but only a small percentage seek medical care. It commonly starts in young or middle aged adults. It may last for a short time or may recur over many years. It may also lessen or disappear with advancing age.

It is not clear what actually causes the pain. It is thought that there may be spasm of the rectal, anal or pelvic floor muscles or irritation of the related nerves. Often, no specific triggers such as constipation, diarrhea or physical activity can be found. Although psychological conditions including anxiety, depression and stress have been associated with the onset of these problems, it is not clear whether they actually can cause anorectal pain.

The diagnosis of one of these disorders is made primarily by a history of typical symptoms. Although most physical exams are normal, an area of tenderness may be felt. There are no specific tests that establish the diagnosis. Before one of these diagnoses is made, exams of the area are performed to rule out the other causes of pain.

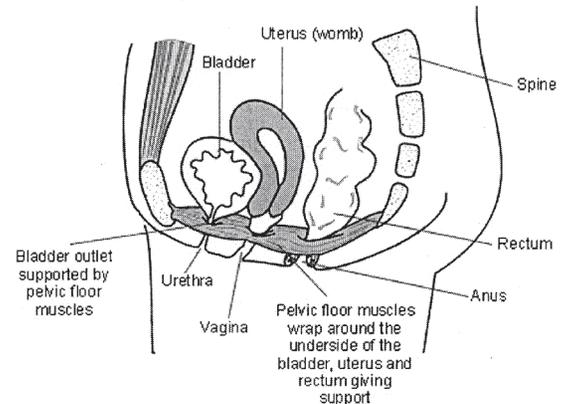
## **PROCTALGIA FUGAX**

The name proctalgia fugax comes from “procto” meaning rectum, “algia” meaning pain, and “fugax” meaning fleeting in Greek. The pain of proctalgia fugax is typically

sharp, sudden and, at times, severe. It may last from seconds to minutes. It is often described as stabbing, spasms, cramping or burning. It may occur at night, waking the person from sleep. Attacks are episodic and seem to occur in clusters. Months may pass between episodes, and then the pain may recur multiple days in a row. Typically, there is no pain in between attacks.

Because the pain is so short-lived, medications are generally useful for the acute attacks. If the attacks last longer than several minutes or if the clusters are prolonged, treatment with medications such as antispasmodics, muscle relaxants or pain relievers (taken either under the tongue, by mouth or as suppositories) may be tried. Warm tub baths, warm (not hot) heating pads or ice packs may be used.

## **Side view: Female bladder and related structures**



## **LEVATOR ANI SYNDROME**

The levator ani muscles are the same as the pelvic floor muscles. They stretch across the lower open end of the ring of the bony pelvis and support all of the internal organs when you stand upright. Levator ani means “lifting the anus” and that is part of what they do. Pain associ-

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For more information call the Division of Colon and Rectal Surgery at Tufts Medical Center:

**617-636-6190**

or visit [www.tuftsmedicalcenter.org/OurServices/SurgicalServices/ColonRectalSurgery](http://www.tuftsmedicalcenter.org/OurServices/SurgicalServices/ColonRectalSurgery)