

CLINICAL SKILLS: DIGITAL RECTAL EXAMINATION (DRE)

Always do a DRE on patients who are admitted with lower abdominal pain and/or prostatism (males)

- **Ensure there is a chaperone (if patient doesn't mind, then write that one was offered on the notes)**
- **Wash hands**
- **Introduce and explain. Warn patient this is an uncomfortable examination**
- **Permission**
- **Expose - from knees to mid-back (trousers and underwear)**
- **Reposition - left lateral position with knees up to tummy (similar to foetal position)**

Inspection:

- **Warn the patient before touching them**
- **Begin by lifting up right buttock with your right hand and look for:**
 - Fistulae
 - Skin tags
 - Sores
 - Masses/swellings (e.g.: warts, haemorrhoids, tumours)
 - Rashes
 - Fissures
 - Faeces (incontinence), bleeding or other discharge
 - Scars
 - Sinuses
 - Foreign bodies
 - Rectal prolapse

Palpation:

- Put gloves on both hands
- Put lubricant containing local anaesthetic on gloves (e.g.: Aquagel)
- Ask the patient to relax 'as if they were sitting on the toilet'
- **Warn the patient before inserting your finger**
- Use the index finger of the right hand and gently insert into their rectum
- Feel the posterior wall
- Gently turn finger round
- Feel the anterior wall
- You should be feeling for:
 - Polyps (soft and attached to the mucosa)
 - Faeces (is it very firm or soft?)
 - Tumours (hard and irregular masses)
 - Foreign bodies
 - On the anterior wall, you are also feeling for the prostate (males) and the cervix or for fibroids (females)
 - When palpating for the prostate, feel for:
 - 2 lobes and sulcus (right lateral lobe, left lateral lobe and median sulcus)
 - A normal prostate is flat and smooth. You can get above it.

- Malignant prostate = craggy, large, cannot feel the median sulcus.
 - If someone has an abnormal feeling gland, they may warrant a 'Prostate Specific Antigen' blood test (this will be artificially high for a few days after carrying out a digital rectal examination) and possibly transrectal ultrasound imaging with biopsies of the prostate.
- Remove finger and **inspect** for mucous, blood and faeces
- Clean any excess lubricant from around anus using a tissue
- Remove gloves carefully and wash hands
- Thank patient and offer them assistance to get dressed again