

Upper Gastrointestinal Bleeding

NHS.UK Stomach Ulcer (Aug 2025) | BSG Guidelines | NICE CG141

■ 999: Active Bleeding or Haemodynamic Compromise

- Vomiting bright red blood or coffee-ground material (haematemesis)
- Melaena (jet black, tarry stools, often with a characteristic offensive odour) with dizziness on standing, fainting, or pallor
- Severe abdominal pain alongside any bleeding symptoms
- Pale, cold, clammy, confused, or unable to stand: signs of significant blood loss
- Do not offer antacids. Avoid eating or drinking. Bring all medicines.

■ URGENT: Same-Day Assessment

- Dark or black stools in a patient on anticoagulants, NSAIDs, or aspirin
- Dark stools in a patient with liver disease, peptic ulcer history, or previous GI bleed
- Uncertain whether black stools are melaena or medication-related
- Do not advise antacids and monitoring at home without a clear, confident alternative explanation.

Feature	Melaena (Upper GI Bleed)	Iron / Bismuth
Colour	Jet black	Dark or black
Consistency	Tarry and sticky	Normal or formed
Smell	Often offensive (characteristic odour, if noticed)	No unusual odour
Context	Dizziness, vomiting, risk meds	Iron started recently

TARRY: Quick Assessment Framework

T	Tarry and offensive?	Melaena is usually jet black, sticky like tar, and often has a characteristic offensive smell. Iron and bismuth do not cause this character.
A	Anticoagulant or NSAID?	NSAIDs, aspirin, warfarin, apixaban, rivaroxaban, edoxaban, dabigatran: new dark stools in these patients need same-day review.
R	Red blood or coffee vomit?	Any haematemesis is a 999 situation. No safe watchful waiting for vomiting blood.
R	Rising causes dizziness?	Postural dizziness or fainting means significant blood loss. Call 999.
Y	Yes: refer urgently	Pharmacy is not the right setting for suspected upper GI bleeding. Do not offer antacids as a holding measure.