SYMPTOM

Urine - abnormal color

Abnormal urine color means urine looks different from its usual pale yellow shade.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
My urine looks different from its usual pale yellow

WHERE IT IS FELT
Urine seen in the toilet or collection cup

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Dehydration, food pigments, medicines or vitamins

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Visible blood, clots, severe pain, fever, or trouble urinating

USUALLY LASTS
Hours to days, based on food, hydration, medicine, or illness

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Unexplained color persists, recurs, or looks pink or red

Overview

Healthy urine is usually clear and pale yellow to amber. Its color comes from a natural pigment called urochrome. The shade can change with how much fluid you drink: concentrated urine is darker, while diluted urine is lighter.

Food pigments, vitamins, medicines, bleeding, and several health conditions can also change urine color. The color alone usually cannot identify the cause. Lighting, toilet-cleaning products, and menstrual blood can affect what you see.

A brief change after eating a strongly colored food or starting a known color-changing medicine is often harmless. Pink, red, or cola-colored urine needs more attention because it may contain blood, even when there is no pain.

What it may feel or look like

A color change may occur without any other symptom. You might notice:

Other symptoms can help narrow down the cause. Burning when urinating, needing to urinate often, lower abdominal discomfort, fever, or back pain may occur with a urinary infection.

Severe pain in the side or groin can occur with a kidney stone.

Dark brown urine with yellow skin or eyes may be related to bile pigments from a liver or bile-duct problem. Tea-colored urine with marked muscle pain or weakness can occur when damaged muscle releases a protein called myoglobin.

- Dark yellow or amber urine
- Orange, pink, red, brown, blue, or green urine
- Cloudy or milky-looking urine
- Blood clots or red streaks
- A stronger smell alongside the color change

Common causes

Common and usually temporary causes

Dark yellow urine often means it is concentrated, such as after sweating, sleeping, or not drinking enough. Beetroot, blackberries, food dyes, and some other foods can produce pink, red, or unusual shades.

B vitamins may make urine bright yellow. Some medicines can turn it orange, red, brown, blue, or green. For example, the urinary pain-relief medicine phenazopyridine commonly causes orange urine. Do not stop a prescribed medicine only because the urine changed color; check its information or ask a pharmacist or clinician.

Menstrual blood or bleeding from outside the urinary tract can also mix with urine.

Less common causes

Blood in urine is called hematuria. It may be caused by a urinary infection, kidney stone, strenuous exercise, prostate problems, kidney inflammation, an injury, or another urinary tract condition. Less commonly, it can be associated with kidney or bladder cancer. Blood may turn urine pink, red, smoky, or brown.

Cloudy or milky urine can result from crystals, white blood cells, mucus, vaginal discharge, or infection. Blue or green urine is usually linked to dyes or medicines, although certain infections and uncommon metabolic conditions can cause it.

Orange or brown urine can contain bilirubin, a yellow-brown substance processed by the liver. This may happen with some liver or bile-duct conditions.

Causes needing urgent assessment

Red urine with clots can block urine flow. Dark urine accompanied by severe muscle pain or

weakness may indicate substantial muscle injury. Red or brown urine with fever, vomiting, or severe side or back pain may occur with a serious infection or an obstructing stone.

When to seek medical care

Seek emergency help if you cannot urinate, particularly if you have lower abdominal pain or are passing clots. Emergency care is also appropriate for abnormal urine color with fainting, confusion, severe weakness, breathing difficulty, or rapidly worsening illness.

Get same-day medical advice if:

Visible blood should be assessed promptly, even if it happens once, is painless, or seems to go away.

Arrange a routine appointment if an unexplained color change lasts more than a few days, keeps returning, or comes with ongoing burning, urgency, unusual thirst, frequent urination, or a persistent strong smell. If a food, vitamin, or medicine clearly explains the change and you otherwise feel well, monitoring may be reasonable.

- Your urine appears pink, red, or blood-stained without a clear food-related explanation
- You have red or brown urine with fever, severe side pain, vomiting, or chills
- Dark urine occurs with severe muscle pain, swelling, or weakness
- Dark urine occurs with yellow skin or eyes, pale stools, or significant abdominal pain
- You are passing blood clots but can still urinate

How the cause is found

A clinician will ask when the color changed and whether you have pain, fever, urinary symptoms, recent heavy exercise, an injury, menstrual bleeding, or yellowing of the skin. Bring a list of medicines, vitamins, and supplements. Mention strongly colored foods and any recent procedures involving dyes.

A urine test can check for blood, infection, protein, bilirubin, and other substances. Looking at urine under a microscope can confirm whether red blood cells are present. A urine culture may be used when infection is possible.

Depending on the findings, you may need blood tests to assess kidney or liver function, blood-cell levels, or muscle injury. Ultrasound, CT imaging, or a camera examination of the bladder called cystoscopy may be considered when bleeding is confirmed or keeps returning.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the cause rather than the color itself. Food-related changes generally fade after the pigment leaves your body. Medicine-related changes may continue while you take the medicine.

If you may be mildly dehydrated, drink enough fluid to ease thirst and return urine toward pale yellow. Do not force large amounts of water, especially if you have been told to limit fluids because of a heart or kidney condition.

Keep a brief note of the color, timing, foods, medicines, exercise, and other symptoms. A photograph taken in neutral lighting may help if the change disappears before your appointment.

Do not use leftover antibiotics like amoxicillin or doxycycline . Antibiotics only help certain bacterial infections. Kidney stones, liver conditions, urinary bleeding, and muscle injury require different care. Do not stop prescribed medicines without professional advice.

What to expect

Color caused by food or mild dehydration often improves within hours to a couple of days. A medicine-related change may last until the medicine and its pigments have cleared.

If blood, infection, or another condition is found, recovery depends on the underlying cause. The visible color may clear before the cause has fully resolved, so attend recommended follow-up and testing.

A normal-looking urine sample does not always rule out bleeding because small amounts of blood may only be detected by testing. Recurrent unexplained changes should be reviewed even when urine looks normal between episodes.

Common questions

Can dehydration make urine brown?

Dehydration usually causes dark yellow or amber urine. Very dark brown or cola-colored urine may have another cause, especially if drinking normally does not improve it.

Can food make urine look bloody?

Yes. Beetroot, blackberries, and red food dyes can produce pink or red urine. If you are unsure whether the color is blood, or it continues after the food has cleared, seek medical advice.

Is clear urine unhealthy?

Occasional clear urine often means you recently drank plenty of fluid. Constantly clear urine with excessive thirst or frequent urination should be discussed at a routine appointment.

Does blood in urine always hurt?

No. Blood can appear without pain or other symptoms. Painless visible blood still needs prompt assessment.

Can toilet cleaners change how urine looks?

Yes. Cleaning chemicals and colored toilet water can distort urine color. If possible, check a fresh sample in a clean, clear container without cleaning products.

Sources

- Urine - abnormal color , MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia, U.S. National Library of Medicine
- Hematuria (Blood in the Urine) , National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
- Blood in urine , NHS
- Microhematuria: AUA/SUFU Guideline , American Urological Association
- Signs and Symptoms of Rhabdomyolysis , National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention