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. If awaiting ambulance transfer, avoid eating or drinking. Bring all medicines.

URGENT: Same-Day Assessment

- ☐ Confirmed melaena requires urgent same-day assessment even without haemodynamic symptoms and may require hospital-based evaluation
- ☐ Dark or black stools in a patient on anticoagulants, NSAIDs, aspirin, clopidogrel, or ticagrelor
- ☐ 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.

Melaena vs Medication-Induced Dark Stools

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 present)	No unusual odour
Context	Dizziness, vomiting, risk meds	Taking iron or bismuth; typical stool character

TARRY: Quick Assessment Framework

T	**Tarry and offensive?**	Melaena is jet black, sticky like tar, and often has an offensive odour. Iron and bismuth do not cause this character.
A	**Anticoagulant or antiplatelet?**	NSAIDs, aspirin, clopidogrel, ticagrelor, warfarin, apixaban, rivaroxaban, edoxaban, dabigatran: any possible melaena in these patients needs same-day assessment.
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.