



Digestive health

The digestive system breaks down food into nutrients. These nutrients help keep us healthy and provide the energy we need to live. The digestive system also gets rid of food parts that can't be broken down.

Many people suffer from stomach troubles from time to time. When your digestion acts up, it may signal something else is wrong. That's why it's important to get screenings that can help find problems early, while they're easier to treat.¹

Talk to your healthcare provider if you have any of these symptoms:

- Ongoing vomiting or diarrhea
- Unrelieved heartburn
- Black, tarry stool
- Unintended weight loss
- Stomach or rectal pain
- Blood or pus when you have a bowel movement¹

Remember: When in doubt, get checked out.

Ask your healthcare provider about screenings

If you have symptoms of digestive diseases, it's important to get the right screenings and treatment. Your provider can help you determine which test is right for you. They may recommend:

- **Endoscopy:** Looks at internal organs using a flexible viewing tube (endoscope). Doctors look for signs of irritation, ulcers, inflammation or abnormal growths.
- **Colonoscopy:** Looks at the large intestine (colon) lining using a colonoscope. Ask your doctor how frequently you should have a colon cancer screening.
- **Sigmoidoscopy:** Looks at the rectum and last part of the colon.
- **Stool analysis:** Looks at solid waste to find digestive problems, including an infection and even cancer.²

Take control of your digestive health

If you have any of the symptoms above, it is important to talk to your healthcare provider and keep track of your symptoms and triggers to find the right diagnosis and treatment for you. **Your provider may recommend that you:**

1. Try keeping a daily journal of symptoms to show your doctor.

This may help show if your symptoms are linked to stress, emotions, diet or other factors. This will help you and your doctor decide how to treat your problem.

2. Ask your healthcare provider about screenings and tests you need.

You could help make your life better by taking care of things before they're problems.

3. Write down your immunizations, screenings and results to stay on track to better health.

4. Ask your healthcare provider specific questions about digestive health, like:

- Am I at risk?
- What can I do to manage or prevent my digestive problems?
- How will my digestive problems affect me?

Digestive diseases

Read below to learn about the common symptoms associated with different digestive diseases.

Digestive disease	Symptoms
Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frequent heartburn
Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stomach pain or cramping• Diarrhea and/or constipation• Gas and bloating• A constant feeling of needing to have a bowel movement• Mucus in the stool
Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) (including ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diarrhea (possibly with blood or pus)• Stomach discomfort• Urgent need to have a bowel movement• Weight loss• Nausea or loss of appetite• Fever and fatigue
Diverticulitis or diverticulosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abdominal cramping• Constipation or diarrhea• Bloating
Celiac disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diarrhea and/or constipation• Excessive gas• Abdominal pain and/or bloating• Nausea or vomiting³

Have you experienced any abnormal GI symptoms?

Questions for my doctor:

Sources

1. "Health Screening", National Library of Medicine, last accessed August 9, 2024, <https://medlineplus.gov/healthscreening.html>.
2. "Diagnostic Tests", National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, last accessed August 9, 2024, <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diagnostic-tests#digestive-diseases-accordion-row>.
3. "Digestive Diseases", National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, last accessed August 9, 2024, <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/digestive-diseases>.

This is for informational purposes only and does not replace treatment or advice from a healthcare professional. If you have questions, please talk with your doctor. Talk to your doctor before beginning an exercise program or making any changes to your diet.