

Monthly Wellness SpotLight by PSA

IN GOOD HEALTH

THE 5 MOST COMMON GASTROINTESTINAL DISEASES

One of the most sensitive components in the body is the digestive system. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, between 60 and 70 million people are affected by digestive diseases. Below we will highlight the 5 most common gastrointestinal diseases.

Celiac Disease

Celiac disease damages the small intestine and interferes with absorption of nutrients from food. Those with Celiac disease are intolerant or sensitive to gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, and barley. Symptoms include diarrhea; abdominal pain and bloating; food intolerance; weight loss; vomiting; constipation; depression/anxiety; tingling and/or numbness in hands and feet; seizures; fatigue; and itchy skin rash. The inflammation associated with Celiac disease carries a risk of some gastrointestinal cancers. Treatment consists of following a strict, gluten-free diet.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Symptoms of this gastrointestinal (GI) disorder are caused by changes in how the GI tract works and can include both diarrhea and constipation. The most common symptoms of IBS are abdominal pain or discomfort, cramping, and changes in bowel habits.

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

GERD results when the lower esophageal sphincter—the muscle that acts as the valve between the esophagus and stomach—becomes weak or relaxes when it should not. This causes stomach contents to travel up the esophagus, triggering heartburn. Common symptoms include dry, chronic cough; wheezing; nausea; vomiting; sore throat; hoarseness; laryngitis; difficult or painful swallowing; pain in the chest or upper abdomen; and dental erosion and bad breath. To diagnose GERD, a gastroenterologist may use an upper endoscopy. Treatment for GERD may involve lifestyle changes, medications, or surgery, depending on the severity of the issue.

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)

IBD is an umbrella for some serious digestive disorders including Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. Though researchers have not found a specific cause of IBD, it is suspected to be a combination of a faulty immune system, genetics, and environmental factors. Major symptoms of both conditions include persistent diarrhea; rectal bleeding; urgent need to move bowels; abdominal pain; and constipation. Your gastroenterologist may recommend an upper endoscopy and/or colonoscopy to diagnose IBD. Treatment includes a combination of options including medication, changes in diet and nutrition, and surgery.

Gastroparesis

This digestive disorder reduces the ability of the stomach to empty its contents, slowing or stopping the movement of food from the stomach to the small intestine. Diabetes is the most commonly known cause of gastroparesis, but other identifiable causes include intestinal surgery and nervous system disease such as Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis. Common symptoms include nausea; vomiting undigested food; and a feeling of fullness after eating only a small portion of food. Other symptoms include acid reflux; pain in the stomach area; abdominal bloating; and lack of appetite. Gastroparesis may be diagnosed through a physical exam, medical history evaluation, and blood tests. In many cases, gastroparesis is a chronic condition; however, a combination of nutritional changes and medication can help manage symptom severity.

The best way to minimize the threat these five conditions pose to your digestive health is to learn their symptoms and promptly report any concerns to your doctor or gastroenterologist.