

14. Digestive Health

14.1 Overview

Digestive health refers to the efficient functioning of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract — from food digestion to nutrient absorption and waste elimination.

Common digestive disorders include **acid reflux (GERD)**, **irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)**, **ulcers**, **constipation**, and **inflammatory bowel diseases**.

According to the **NIH**, digestive diseases affect over **60 million Americans annually**. ([NIH, 2023](#))

14.2 Causes / Risk Factors

- Unhealthy diet (low fiber, high fat, high processed foods).
- Dehydration and lack of physical activity.
- Chronic stress and irregular eating habits.
- Infection (*H. pylori*), excessive alcohol, or NSAID overuse.
- Genetic predisposition and autoimmune factors (e.g., Crohn's disease).

14.3 Symptoms / Indicators

- Abdominal pain, bloating, heartburn, constipation, diarrhea.
- Blood in stool or unintentional weight loss may indicate serious GI conditions.
- Chronic fatigue due to nutrient malabsorption.

14.4 Prevention / Lifestyle

- Eat fiber-rich foods (fruits, vegetables, whole grains).
- Stay hydrated and limit processed/fried foods.
- Avoid late-night meals and maintain regular eating schedules.

- Manage stress and maintain adequate sleep.
- Moderate alcohol and caffeine intake. ([Mayo Clinic, 2024](#))

14.5 Screening / Diagnosis

- **Endoscopy, colonoscopy, or ultrasound** for structural evaluation.
- **Blood tests** for anemia, inflammation (CRP).
- **Stool tests** for infection or occult blood.
Early detection is key to prevent complications like ulcers or cancers.

14.6 Management / Public Health Perspective

Digestive health programs emphasize dietary education, sanitation, and access to safe food and water.

India's Swachh Bharat Mission indirectly supports gut health by improving sanitation.
WHO promotes antimicrobial resistance awareness and appropriate antibiotic use to reduce gut infections.

Summary Points

- Digestive health depends on diet, hydration, and hygiene.
- Persistent digestive symptoms require medical evaluation.
- Public health emphasizes sanitation and food safety.