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## Digestive diseases

Digestive diseases are disorders of the digestive tract, which is sometimes called the gastrointestinal (GI) tract.

In digestion, food and drink are broken down into small parts (called nutrients) that the body can absorb and use as energy and building blocks for cells.

The digestive tract is made up of the esophagus (food tube), stomach, large and small intestines, liver, pancreas, and the gallbladder.

## Information

The first sign of problems in the digestive tract often includes one or more of the following symptoms:

- Bleeding
- Bloating
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Heartburn
- Incontinence
- Nausea and vomiting
- Pain in the belly
- Swallowing problems
- Weight gain or loss

A digestive disease is any health problem that occurs in the digestive tract. Conditions may range from mild to serious. Some common problems include heartburn, cancer, irritable bowel syndrome, and lactose intolerance.

Other digestive diseases include:

- Gallstones, cholecystitis, and cholangitis
- Rectal problems, such as anal fissure, hemorrhoids, proctitis, and rectal prolapse
- Esophagus problems, such as stricture (narrowing), achalasia, and esophagitis

- Stomach problems, including gastritis, gastric ulcers (usually caused by *Helicobacter pylori* infection) and cancer
- Liver problems, such as hepatitis B or hepatitis C, cirrhosis, liver failure, and autoimmune and alcoholic hepatitis
- Pancreatitis and pancreatic pseudocyst
- Intestinal problems, such as polyps and cancer, infections, celiac disease, Crohn disease, ulcerative colitis, diverticulitis, malabsorption, short bowel syndrome, and intestinal ischemia
- Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), peptic ulcer disease, and hiatal hernia

Tests for digestive problems can include colonoscopy, upper GI endoscopy, capsule endoscopy, endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP), and endoscopic ultrasound.

Many surgical procedures are performed on the digestive tract. These include procedures done using endoscopy, laparoscopy, and open surgery. Organ transplants can be performed on the liver, pancreas, and small intestine.

Many health care providers can help diagnose and treat digestive problems. A gastroenterologist is a physician specialist who has received extra training in the diagnosis and treatment of the digestive disorders. Other providers involved in the treatment of digestive diseases include:

- Nurse practitioners (NPs) or physician assistants (PAs)
- Nutritionists or dietitians
- Primary care doctors
- Radiologists
- Surgeons

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