

# 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.<sup>1</sup>

## Talk to your healthcare provider if you have any of these symptoms:<sup>1</sup>

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

**Remember:** When in doubt, get checked out.

## Ask your healthcare provider about screenings<sup>2</sup>

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.

## Take control of your digestive health

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:

### 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?
- How will my digestive problems affect me?
- What screenings do I need?
- What can I do to manage or prevent my digestive problems?
- What are my treatment options?

## Digestive diseases<sup>3</sup>

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

### Sources

1. National Library of Medicine – MedlinePlus  
[medlineplus.gov/healthscreening.html](https://medlineplus.gov/healthscreening.html)
2. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases  
[www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diagnostic-tests](https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diagnostic-tests)
3. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases  
[www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/digestive-diseases](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.