



Lane  
Gastroenterology

*Care You Can Count On*

# 10 MOST COMMON GASTROINTESTINAL DISORDERS

## A PATIENT'S GUIDE:



The digestive system is among the body's most impressive structures. It is comprised of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, along with the liver, pancreas, and gallbladder. The GI tract is a system of hollow organs connected to a long tube that runs from the mouth to the anus. Included among these organs are the esophagus, stomach, and small and large intestines.



As a whole, the digestive system serves the critical functions of taking in food, converting that food into energy and expelling waste. It is the fuel delivery system that keeps our bodies running, and it directly influences much of our health. When a gastrointestinal disorder develops, it can not only result in digestive troubles and bothersome symptoms, it may have a greater impact on your overall well-being as well. In this guide, we will review 10 of the most common gastrointestinal disorders and how each may affect your health.

## CELIAC DISEASE

Understanding of celiac disease has expanded greatly in recent years, leading to a trend in gluten-free diets and increased availability in dietary options. The condition, which is believed to affect 1 in 133 Americans<sup>2</sup>, is an autoimmune disorder which causes a sensitivity to gluten and leads to damage of the small intestine when it is consumed. Specifically, the immune system will attack finger-like protrusions called villi which help in the absorption of nutrients. As a result, those with untreated celiac disease may also suffer from related conditions such as anemia, loss of bone density, infertility, IBS, and depression.

The symptoms of celiac vary in type and intensity from one patient to the next. Among the most common are constipation, diarrhea, weight loss, bloating, vomiting, and abdominal pain. While many patients go years before reaching an accurate diagnosis, most find an incredible reversal of their symptoms once they stop consuming gluten.

## CROHN'S DISEASE

Crohn's disease is a severe form of inflammatory bowel disease, or IBD. Its exact cause is unknown, but it could be related to both immune system malfunction and hereditary factors. Most frequently, it is diagnosed before the age of 30 and is more likely to impact Caucasians and those who have a family history.

Crohn's can impact any part of the digestive tract, where it causes inflammation. This inflammation can affect deep layers of bowel tissue and cause many bothersome symptoms, including diarrhea, abdominal pain, blood in the stool, and weight loss. In severe cases, inflammation may also begin to impact the skin, eyes, joints, liver, and bile ducts. In children, growth may be delayed.

There are many potentially dangerous complications associated with Crohn's disease. These include malnutrition, fistulas, ulcers, bowel obstruction, and even colon cancer. Treatment for Crohn's is imperative. Depending on the location and severity of the condition, a gastroenterologist may recommend medication, dietary restrictions, and even surgery.





## COLON POLYPS

Colorectal cancer is currently the third most common cancer among both American men and women (excluding skin cancer). It is also the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths. Yet, colorectal cancer is highly preventable and treatable when detected early. In fact, when found in the early stages, before cancer has spread, the five-year survival rate is an astounding 90 percent<sup>3</sup>.

Early detection of colon cancer is accomplished through colonoscopy screenings. During the procedure, a gastroenterologist will look for colon polyps, or growths along the lining of the colon. Most polyps are benign at the time of their discovery and removal. However, if left alone, most will go on to develop into colon cancer. By identifying and removing the polyps during a colonoscopy, this development can be prevented.

## DIVERTICULITIS

Diverticulitis is a condition in which diverticula within the digestive tract become inflamed or infected. These small pouches in the lining of the tract are most often found in the lower part of the colon and are most commonly observed after the age of 40. For most, diverticula never become a problem. However, for patients who develop diverticulitis, symptoms such as pain, fever, nausea and constipation may be experienced.

Mild cases of diverticulitis are often successfully treated with a regimen of antibiotics and clear liquids. Patients may also be advised to follow a diet that is high in fiber. More severe cases which are not successfully treated with these methods or that lead to additional health complications such as abscess or blockage may require surgery to remove the diseased section of the colon. Complications such as these occur in about 25 percent of all diverticulitis patients<sup>4</sup>.

## FISSURES

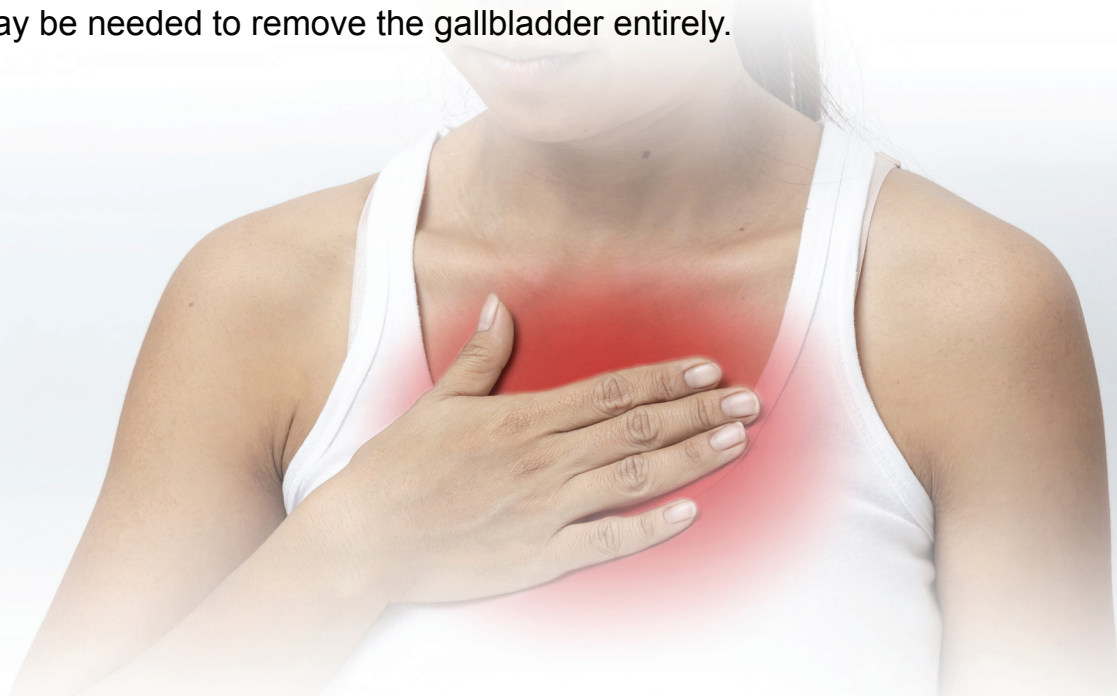
Anal fissures are small tears that occur in the lining of the anus. They may develop as a result of too little fiber, straining with bowel movements, constipation, diarrhea, or recent vaginal childbirth. Their symptoms are often confused with those of hemorrhoids and can include pain and bleeding with bowel movements.

Fortunately, most cases of anal fissure will resolve within 6 weeks with the use of conservative treatment methods such as increased dietary fiber, stool softeners, and sitz baths. Fissures that do not resolve within six weeks are considered chronic and may require additional treatments recommended by a gastroenterologist. Chronic anal fissures develop in approximately 40 percent of all cases.<sup>1</sup>

## GALLSTONES

The gallbladder is a small, pear-shaped organ that sits just beneath the liver and secretes bile into the small intestine to aid in digestion. Gallstones develop when this bile forms into hardened deposits within the gallbladder. Some may have only a single gallstone, whereas others may develop several, and they can range in size from a grain of sand to a golf ball.

For many, gallstones cause no symptoms at all. However, should a stone cause a blockage by becoming lodged in a bile duct, patients may begin to experience intense pain in the upper right quadrant of the abdomen. Other pain regions may include the right shoulder or between the shoulder blades, and patients may experience nausea or vomiting as well. In these instances, medications may be used to dissolve gallstones. However, if that is ineffective, surgery may be needed to remove the gallbladder entirely.



## GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX DISEASE (GERD)

Stomach acid plays an important role in the digestion process. However, for some, this acid does not remain strictly in the stomach. When acid backs up into the esophagus, it can cause a burning sensation and discomfort in the chest. This is commonly referred to as heartburn or acid reflux. For most people, this is an occasional occurrence which resolves on its own or with the help of at-home remedies such as antacid. However, for others the condition becomes a chronic problem.

GERD is acid reflux that occurs at least twice per week and causes irritation to the lining of the esophagus. For about 20 percent of the population, acid reflux occurs frequently enough to be classified as GERD<sup>5</sup>. In these cases, patients may find relief in dietary and lifestyle changes or stronger, prescription medications. More severe cases of GERD or those which develop complications such as esophageal stricture or Barrett's esophagus may require surgery to prevent the stomach acid from reaching the esophagus.



## HEMORRHOIDS

Hemorrhoids are swollen, inflamed clusters of veins in the rectum or anus that develop as a result of pressure. Common sources of this pressure include pregnancy, obesity, straining during bowel movements, or sitting on the toilet for prolonged periods of time. Although many find hemorrhoids to be embarrassing, 75 percent of people over the age of 45 will experience them<sup>5</sup>.

The symptoms and treatment of hemorrhoids depends on their location. Internal hemorrhoids located inside the rectum often cause no symptoms at all and do not require treatment. External hemorrhoids, however, can itch, bleed, and become quite uncomfortable. For these, at-home remedies and medicated ointments are typically effective. In the event they are not, a gastroenterologist can treat the condition with a simple procedure known as hemorrhoid banding.



## IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME (IBS)

IBS is a common condition affecting the large intestine of millions of Americans. The exact cause of IBS is unknown, but possibilities include inflammation, infection, nervous system abnormalities, or changes to gut bacteria. Symptoms of the condition include abdominal pain, bloating, gas, constipation, and diarrhea.

Those most likely to develop IBS are women, individuals under the age of 50, those with a family history of IBS, and those who suffer from mental health disorders such as anxiety or depression. While IBS is a chronic condition for which there is no known cure, effective management of common triggers such as stress, hormones, and certain foods can usually keep symptoms under control.





## ULCERATIVE COLITIS (UC)

Like Crohn's disease, UC is also a form of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). In fact, it is the most common form of IBD, affecting over 900,000 Americans<sup>6</sup>. The condition causes long-lasting inflammation and ulcers within the rectum and colon, resulting in many painful and bothersome symptoms. These may include diarrhea with blood or pus, rectal and abdominal pain, urgency yet inability to defecate, weight loss, and fatigue.

Like many other gastrointestinal disorders, the precise causes of UC remain unknown. However, there are many contributing factors which may be identified, including genetic predisposition, lifestyle and environmental factors, and problems within the immune system. Patients who have been diagnosed with UC must take care to maintain communication with their healthcare provider and to manage their symptoms with recommended treatments. In the most severe cases, surgery to remove the colon and/or rectum can effectively eliminate UC but also presents many drastic lifestyle changes for the patient.



Millions of patients across the world suffer daily from gastrointestinal disorders ranging from inconvenient to life-threatening. Understanding your digestive health is key to preventing and managing such conditions. Armed with knowledge and a qualified gastroenterologist, you can be fully prepared to address any GI complications that may come your way.



***If you are currently suffering from gastrointestinal symptoms, contact Lane Gastroenterology to request an appointment.***

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1 [https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/digestive\\_disorders/anal\\_fissures\\_134,174](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/digestive_disorders/anal_fissures_134,174)  
2 <https://www.beyondceliac.org/celiac-disease/facts-and-figures/>  
3 <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/colon-rectal-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/detection.html>  
4 <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/diverticulitis/symptoms-causes/syc-20371758>  
5 <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-statistics/digestive-diseases>  
6 <https://inflammatoryboweldisease.net/types-of-ibd/ulcerative-colitis/ulcerative-colitis-statistics/>