

A Doctor's Guide to Diagnosing Digestion Disorders

The human body is a very efficient machine. Most of the time it works well, adjusting to changes in the environment, resisting infections, and adapting to meet a host of potential dangers. However, the body is not perfect; it cannot always cope with a particular infection or its own systems may fail and sickness results. You must diagnose your patients and advise them of a treatment plan.

Potential Questions

1. What can I help you with today?
2. How have you been feeling lately? What are your symptoms?
3. Has anything else been different lately? Have you had any tests done?
4. Do you have pain anywhere?
5. What is your diet like?
6. Are you eating well?
7. Are you under more stress than normal?

Once you begin to narrow down to a few potential diagnosis ask more specific questions based on what you know about the diseases.

Possible diagnosis

Heartburn and Acid reflux
Lactose intolerant
Gall bladder malfunction
Ulcer
Type II diabetes
Diverticulitis

Malnutrition
Cancer of stomach/bowel
Liver cirrhosis
Inflammatory Bowel Diseases
Celiac Disease
Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Heartburn

- A painful or burning sensation in the esophagus, just below the breastbone.
- Caused by reverse peristalsis of gastric acid.
- The pain often rises in the chest and may radiate to the neck, throat, or jaw.
- Heartburn is also identified as one of the causes of chronic cough, and may even mimic asthma.
- More common after a meal of fat-laden or acidic foods, after taking aspirin, drinking alcohol, smoking, or eating chocolate.
- Obesity, pregnancy, emotional turmoil, and tension can also trigger heartburn.
- Some people may get more bouts of heartburn from certain foods, but each individual has different reactions to particular foods.
- Cigarette smoking contributes to heartburn by causing the cardiac/esophageal sphincter to relax.
- Treatment - antacid pills like Turns, Gelusil and Maalox

Acid Reflux

- Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) affects people who suffer acid reflux/heart burn symptoms more than twice a week. Acid reflux occurs because the lower esophageal sphincter does not close properly.
- Treatment - recreate the patients dietary habits.
 - refrain from spicy food, alcohol, coffee, vitamin supplements, fats and even vegetables like broccoli and cauliflower.
 - prevent overeating and filling up the stomach.
 - Smokers need to quit smoking as nicotine and other toxins can increase the GERD condition.

Lactose intolerance

- The body cannot easily digest lactose, a type of natural sugar found in milk and dairy products.
- Symptoms may include nausea, diarrhea, gas, bloating, and abdominal pain.
- Generally runs in the family.
- Treatment - reduce dairy products in your diet; or ingest lactase enzymes.

Gall bladder malfunction

- Gas and bloating after eating; especially fatty foods.
- Pain in the right shoulder blade.
- Patients may experience non-specific pain or pain ever where.
- No known cause.
- Treatment - reduced fat diet; if pain continues or gall stones form then surgery is necessary.

Type II diabetes

- Often present in older individuals.
- Increased risk in patients with poor diets, who are in active, or who are overweight. Caused because the body's cells do not recognize insulin any longer.
- Common symptoms include: thirst, increased urination, sores on feet, and blurry vision.
- There is increased glucose in the patient's urine.
- Treatment - controlled diet and regular exercise.

Malnutrition

- Common symptoms of malnutrition include: weight loss without dieting, decreased appetite, listlessness, hair and skin appears less unhealthy, water retention, and perhaps a swollen abdomen.
- Malnutrition could be because of a social, psychological, or medical reason.
- Can often accompany high stress situations.
- Will occur with a lack of any one of the essential nutrients; you do not need to be deficient in all nutrients to be malnourished.
- Often a patient will have visibly swollen glands; especially in the neck.
- Treatment - begin with a diet plan; if not successful continue with medical testing.

Cancer of stomach

- Symptoms of stomach cancer at the early stages are hard to identify.
- Symptoms include feeling full after a small meal, nausea, bloating, localized discomfort and vomiting.
- There is no history of genetic or environmental causes.
- Treatment - refer your patient to an oncologist (cancer specialist) for further testing and treatment.

Liver cirrhosis

- A group of chronic diseases of the liver in which normal liver cells are damaged and replaced by scar tissue, decreasing the amount of normal liver tissue.
- The two major problems that eventually cause symptoms are loss of functioning liver cells and distortion of the liver caused by scarring.
- The person may experience fatigue, weakness, and exhaustion.
- Loss of appetite is usual, often with nausea and weight loss.
- Treatment - if due to alcohol and not severe, cease consumption of alcohol. If the liver degeneration has become severe surgery and transplant options need to be followed up.

Ulcers

- Ulcers damage the lining of the stomach because of bacterial infections or adverse side effects of medications such as aspirin, ibuprofen or naproxen.
- Symptoms can include:
 - Burning pain in the abdomen (usually worse a couple of hours after a meal or in the middle of the night when the stomach is empty), nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, loss of weight, tiredness (a symptom of a bleeding ulcer) Weakness (a symptom of a bleeding ulcer)
- Spicy foods and stress may aggravate ulcers, but do not cause them.
- Treatment - Antibiotics or antacids usually alleviate problems long enough for minor ulcers to heal.

Celiac Disease

- Celiac disease can affect children or adults.
- Symptoms include diarrhea, bloating, abdominal pain, skin rash or a thinning of bones.
- In children it can cause growth failure.
- People with the disease are advised to eliminate foods with gluten, a protein that is found in wheat, rye and barley. Gluten damages the lining of the small intestine for people with the disease.
- Treatment - Avoiding gluten (foods such as wheat, rye, and barley) and processed foods that may contain hidden gluten. Wheat is commonly used in many processed foods that one might never suspect.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome/Crohn's Disease

- Affects the muscles in the intestines.
- Can cause gas, abdominal pain, diarrhea or constipation.
- Can be painful and uncomfortable.
- It usually does not lead to further diseases.
- Treatment - control symptoms through diet, stress management and medication.
 - Avoid certain foods, such as cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, brussel sprouts and legumes (beans) may worsen bloating and gassiness.
 - Dietary fiber may lessen symptoms.
 - Individuals with IBS should drink plenty of water, and avoid soda, which may cause gas and abdominal discomfort.
 - Eating smaller meals may lessen the incidence of cramping and diarrhea.
 - Low fat and high carbohydrate meals such as pasta, rice, and whole grain breads may help IBS symptoms (unless the affected individual has celiac disease).
 - Treatment for Crohn's - Medication can eliminate symptoms and prevent flare-ups. Surgery may be needed in some cases to repair the colon.

Diagnosis Activity:

Patient Number	Patient's symptoms	Your diagnosis	Suggested Treatments:
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
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8.			
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11.			
12.			