


M U S C D I G E S T I V E D I S E A S E C E N T E R

M E D I C A L U N I V E R S I T Y O F S O U T H C A R O L I N A

DIGESTIVE DISEASES

An Easy-to-Digest Overview

MUSC
DIGESTIVE DISEASE CENTER



The digestive system is a group of tube-shaped organs, including the esophagus, stomach, duodenum, small intestine, and large intestine (colon and rectum).

WHAT IS THE DIGESTIVE SYSTEM?

The purpose of this complex system is to receive and digest food. It is also responsible for absorbing important nutrients and eliminating waste. Two solid organs, the liver and the pancreas, also play a major role in digestion.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF DIGESTIVE DISEASE?

Nearly everyone has experienced heartburn, upset stomach or mild diarrhea at one time or another. When such symptoms are caused by a digestive disease, however, they usually occur on a more regular basis.

Common symptoms of digestive diseases include:

- Swallowing difficulty or pain
- Discomfort in the lower chest or upper abdomen after eating
- Severe attacks of abdominal pain
- Rapid weight loss
- Tiredness
- Jaundice (yellow eyes or skin)
- Itching
- Heartburn
- Diarrhea
- Anemia
- Rectal Bleeding

Most digestive disease symptoms that last only a short time are not due to serious disease. They are usually caused by dietary problems, temporary infection, reactions to certain medicines, or less serious digestive conditions such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome or hemorrhoids.

It is very important, however, to let your doctor know if you are experiencing any of the above symptoms on a regular basis, especially difficulty swallowing, constant or severe pain, unexplained weight loss or bleeding.



HOW ARE DIGESTIVE DISEASES DIAGNOSED?

Most digestive diseases are very complex, with symptoms that may be hard to detect. Therefore, patients may have a variety of tests done before a diagnosis can be reached. This process usually begins with medical specialists called gastroenterologists (hepatologists if liver problems are suspected). After a complete physical examination and evaluation of the symptoms, certain laboratory tests may be ordered, including a blood test, upper or lower GI series, an ultrasound and endoscopic examinations of the colon, esophagus, stomach or small intestine. (An endoscope is a flexible scope used to view the lining of the esophagus, stomach or colon.) For more complicated cases, CT scans or MRI scans may be used.

WHAT TREATMENT OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE?

There are many new medications, such as those used to reduce acid production, that have been very effective in treating digestive diseases. Advances in endoscopic technology have also made a significant impact. In some cases, gastroenterologists can use endoscopes to make diagnoses and perform treatments at the same time.

Surgery remains an important treatment for certain diseases, especially for gallstones, various cancers and conditions that involve intestinal blockage or twisting. Methods of surgery have advanced enormously over in the past 20 years, becoming safer and more effective.

Like most parts of the body, the digestive system works best when it is not overstressed. Heavy and spicy foods, alcohol, and certain medicines, particularly vitamins and painkillers, can cause serious irritation to the esophagus, stomach and colon. Sensible eating and drinking, therefore, is usually part of any treatment.





WHAT ARE THE CAUSES?

Digestive diseases may be caused by several factors, including infection, stress, alcohol abuse, poor diet and smoking. Digestive diseases may also run in families. The cause of many digestive diseases, however, remains unknown.

MUSC DIGESTIVE DISEASE CENTER

The Digestive Disease Center at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) is one of the top hospitals in the country for the treatment of digestive disorders.

Under the direction of Peter B. Cotton, M.D., the center is staffed by a team of nationally and internationally recognized digestive disease experts.

Digestive diseases often require the unique skills of many different specialists, including gastroenterologists, hepatologists, radiologists, pathologists, oncologists and surgical specialists. At MUSC Digestive Disease Center, we bring all of these special skills together under one roof. The result is a well-coordinated team approach that provides the most efficient, patient-friendly care possible.



MUSC Digestive Disease Center:

"One of America's best hospitals for digestive disorders."

– U.S. News and World Report



The MUSC Digestive Disease Center offers diagnosis and treatment for the full range of digestive diseases, including those effecting the esophagus, stomach, liver and biliary system, pancreas, gall bladder, small intestine, colon, rectum and anus.

Digestive diseases and disorders we routinely treat include:

- Gastrointestinal diseases and motility dysfunction
- Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)
- Gastrointestinal and pancreatic cancers
- Liver disease and transplantation
- Peptic ulcers and gastritis
- Gallstones
- Pancreatitis and bile duct blockages
- Sprue
- Hepatitis
- Malabsorption
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Crohn's disease
- Ulcerative colitis
- Hemorrhoids
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- Peptic ulcer disease
- Bile Duct Damage
- Cancer
- Gastrointestinal diseases in children

NEW DISCOVERIES

In addition to treating patients with the latest available technologies, the specialists at MUSC's Digestive Disease Center are committed to helping develop and test new methods for diagnosing and treating a variety of digestive problems.

FIND OUT MORE

For additional information about digestive diseases, or to learn more about the MUSC Digestive Disease Center, visit www.muschealth.com or www.ddc.musc.edu.

For appointment scheduling, please call MUSC Health Connection at (843) 792-1414 or 1-800-424-MUSC.



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