



Your guide to
gut health.

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Healthy gut. Healthy life.

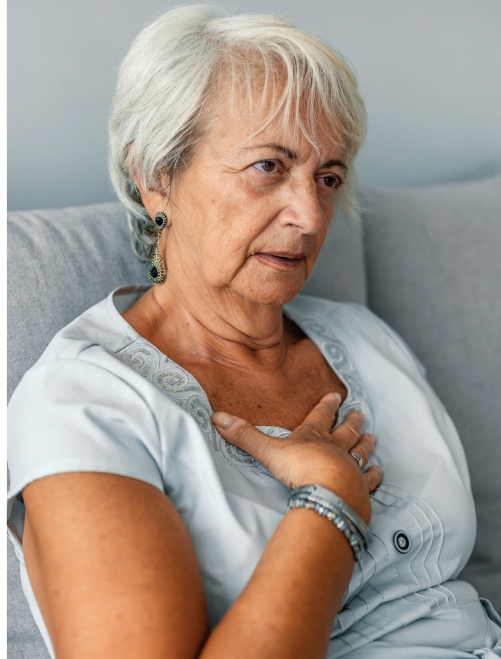


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Your gastrointestinal (GI) health plays a key role in your overall health, including supporting a healthy digestive system. From eating healthy to having your regular colonoscopy after the age of 45, managing your GI health means understanding when and why you might need to see a specialist to treat certain symptoms and disorders.

Want to grasp what a gastroenterologist does? Like to learn the ins and outs of a colonoscopy? You'll find answers among the pages of this guide:

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All about GI: What it is and when you need a specialist.

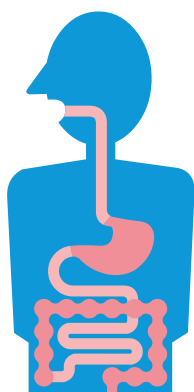
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A gastroenterologist, also called a GI doctor, is a doctor specifically trained in the care and treatment of diseases affecting your digestive system. This includes your esophagus, stomach, small and large intestine, colon, rectum, pancreas, gallbladder, bile ducts and liver.



From simple heartburn to more complex issues, a GI specialist can often diagnose and even treat issues in one visit. They can help with conditions including:

- Heartburn or acid reflux
- GERD
- Trouble swallowing
- Ulcers
- Abdominal pain
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Other conditions affecting the bile ducts, digestive tract, esophagus, gallbladder, intestines, liver or pancreas



You may need to see a GI doctor if you feel chronic stomach pain, notice blood in your stool, experience hemorrhoids, have persistent heartburn or excessive gas, or undergo unexplained weight loss.

GI issues can be treated with a combination of lifestyle changes, medication and therapies, and minimally invasive procedures.

Kids can have GI trouble, too

If your child is experiencing GI issues, our specialists will work closely with their pediatrician to help diagnose and treat their condition.

Here's what to watch for to tell if your child might need to see a GI doctor:

- Bleeding
- Bloating in the belly
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Nausea or vomiting
- Problems or sudden changes with appetite
- Stomach pain



Ouch! What's that pain in my side?

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Maybe it started off small. Maybe it suddenly came out of nowhere. Whatever it is, pain is your body's way of telling you to take it easy — something is wrong.

If you're having pain in your side, there are a few things that may be causing it:

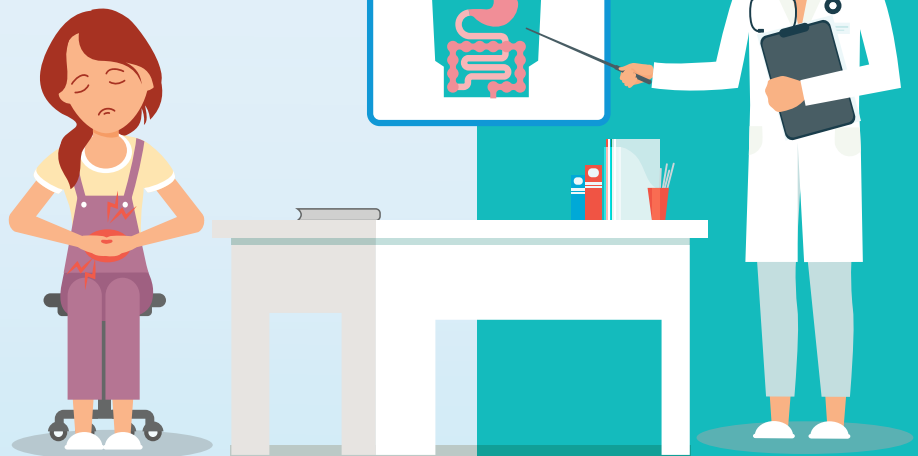
Gas and constipation: Gas and constipation pains can be identified by their inconsistency. The pain may come and go, and it will change depending on how you're sitting or standing. But it should subside within an hour or shortly after a bowel movement.

Irritable bowel syndrome: Irritable bowel syndrome, or IBS, is a common condition that affects the large intestine by causing spasms. Cases can range anywhere from mild to severe, and it often runs in families. Factors like food, stress and hormones can trigger IBS, causing symptoms including cramps, pain, bloating, diarrhea and constipation.

Stones: Kidney stones are deposits of salt and minerals that can form in your kidneys. Gallstones are deposits made from cholesterol and bile that form in the gallbladder. Both can cause excruciating pain. Kidney stones may be passed naturally, but severe cases require surgery.

Appendicitis: Appendicitis, or an infection of the appendix, can be a life-threatening condition. It is considered a medical emergency, and surgery is required to remove your appendix.

If you're having symptoms of appendicitis — severe pain, fever, swelling and tenderness of the abdomen, bloody stools, yellowing of the skin, persistent nausea and vomiting, or pain that interrupts your ability to go about your day — see a doctor immediately.



I need an endoscopy – what does that mean?

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An endoscopy is a minimally invasive procedure that allows your doctor to look at your digestive tract using an endoscope – a long, thin tube with a camera on the end. The device gives your doctor a clear view of your digestive tract so they can diagnose a variety of GI conditions.



There are two types of endoscopies:

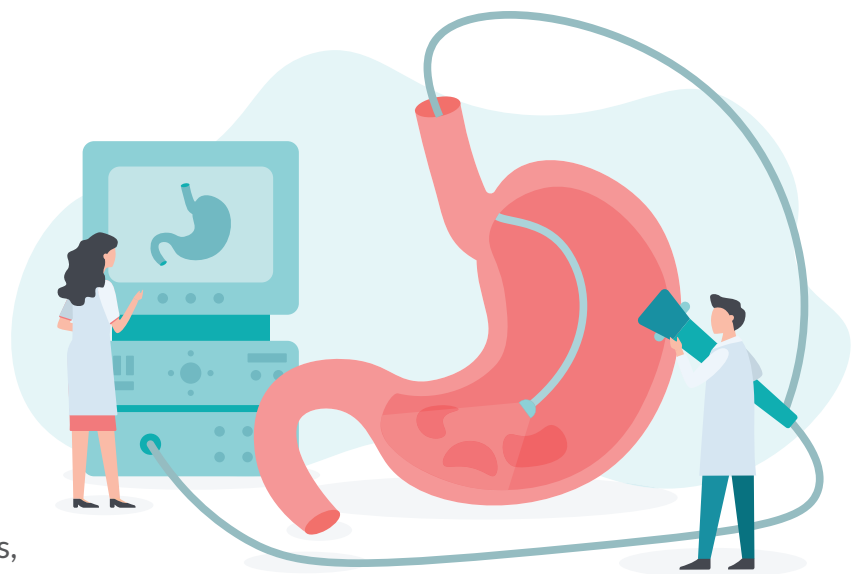
Upper endoscopy – A small, flexible tube with a light is inserted through the mouth to view the esophagus, stomach or small intestine.

Lower endoscopy – A small, flexible tube with a light is inserted into the large intestine to examine the colon, rectum or sigmoid colon. A lower endoscopy may also be called a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy.

Your doctor may order an endoscopy if you have any of the following conditions:

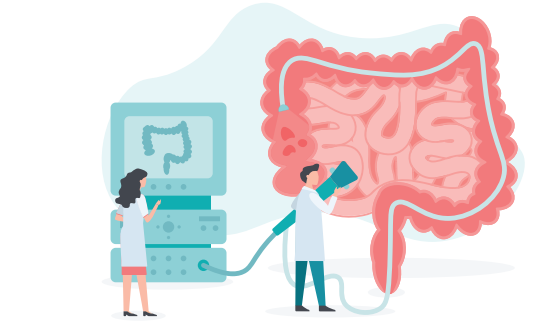
- Heartburn or acid reflux
- Trouble swallowing
- Ulcers
- Abdominal pain
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Unexplained weight loss
- Other conditions affecting the bile ducts, digestive tract, esophagus, gallbladder, intestines, liver or pancreas

As a minimally invasive procedure, an endoscopy can diagnose and treat certain GI conditions – sometimes within the same visit. It can also help your doctor determine if surgery is needed to treat a GI disorder, or if further non-surgical treatment is right for you.



Why it's time to stop putting off your colonoscopy

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A colonoscopy may not be the high point of everyone's day, but it's an easy and effective way to check your gut health. And for some, it can be a lifesaver. So get that appointment scheduled — and while you're waiting, find out exactly what you can expect.

What happens at a colonoscopy exam?

Colonoscopies typically take 30 to 60 minutes and you'll be able to return to normal activities the following day.

During a colonoscopy, your doctor will use a long, flexible tube (a colonoscope) with a tiny video camera at the tip of it that allows them to view the inside of your entire colon. This procedure pinpoints changes or abnormalities in the colon and rectum and is an opportunity for your doctor to remove any abnormal tissue, such as polyps.

Anesthesia is an option for the procedure, but some people decide not to have it. If you choose to have anesthesia, arrange for someone to drive you to and from your appointment.

What is colonoscopy prep like?

Before your colonoscopy, you'll need to clean out your colon to remove residue that may obscure your doctor's view. A combination of liquid and pill laxatives is typically used, and your dose of laxatives may be split between the night before and the morning of the procedure.

Your doctor will give you exact instructions, and they may ask you to alter your diet before your procedure, having you eliminate solid foods 24 hours before the colonoscopy.

Here are some low-fiber foods you can eat during the 3 to 4 days leading up to your exam:

- Eggs
- Fish
- Lean meats
- Well-cooked vegetables (no skin)
- White bread

Be sure to avoid food or drinks containing red, blue or purple food coloring, which could be mistaken for blood during your exam.

By following these steps, along with others your doctor outlines for you, having a colonoscopy is the first step in preventing colon cancer — and potentially saving your life.

You don't have to live with acid reflux

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"Feeling the burn" is great for the gym, but something to avoid in your GI tract. Acid reflux is a condition that occurs when the acid in your stomach travels backwards into your esophagus — the tube that connects your stomach and your throat. When this happens, it often causes a burning feeling in your chest.

Symptoms of acid reflux include:

- Bloating
- Burping
- Chest pain
- Difficulty swallowing
- Feeling of a lump in your throat
- Heartburn
- Regurgitation

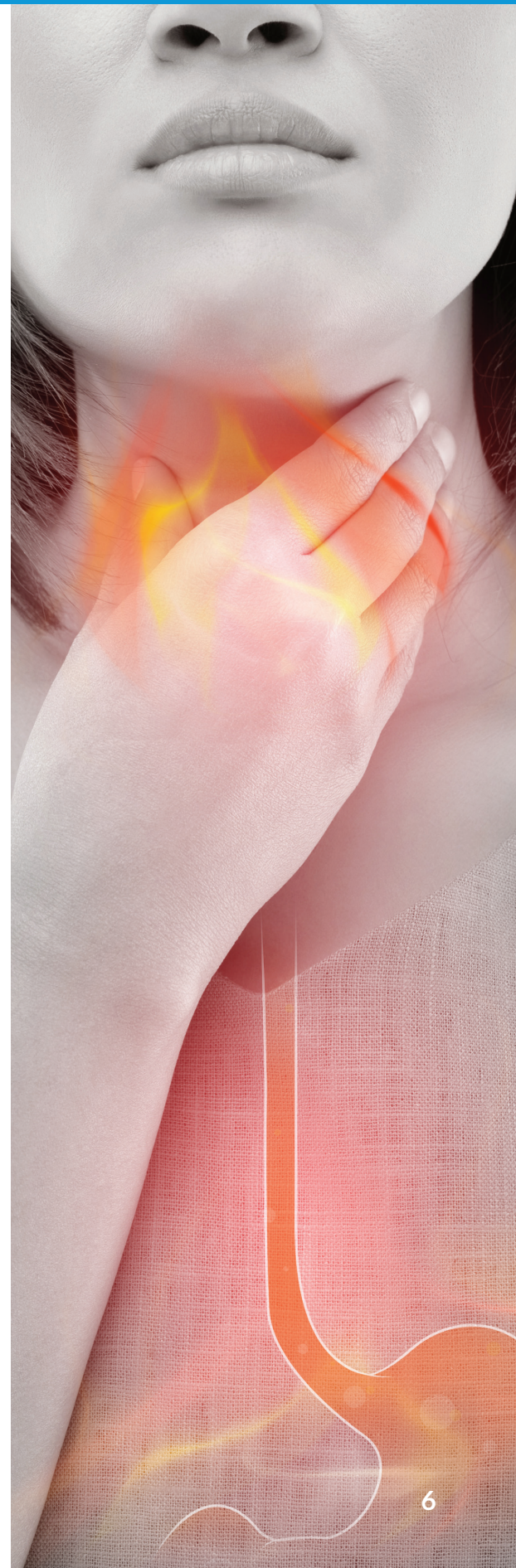
Often, acid reflux is triggered by coffee, alcohol or eating a large meal. Often known as gastroesophageal reflux (GER), it can develop into gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

How to treat acid reflux

Making some simple lifestyle changes can make a big difference when you have acid reflux. Losing weight (even a few pounds) reduces the pressure on your stomach, which lowers the likelihood of acid backing up into your esophagus.

If you smoke, drink alcohol or eat greasy or acidic foods, these can also trigger acid reflux. So simply cutting them out will reduce your symptoms.

Over-the-counter antacids or acid blockers can often effectively treat acid reflux and its symptoms. But see a specialist if your symptoms become more frequent or more severe despite medication and lifestyle changes.



Heartburn and indigestion are both common conditions, but if you experience heartburn symptoms twice a week or more, you may have gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

For people with GERD, eating can become a constant game of trying to balance eating what you want with avoiding reflux symptoms. It's easy to brush off reflux symptoms, especially if they're consistent, but this condition should be taken seriously.

What causes GERD, and why is it a problem?

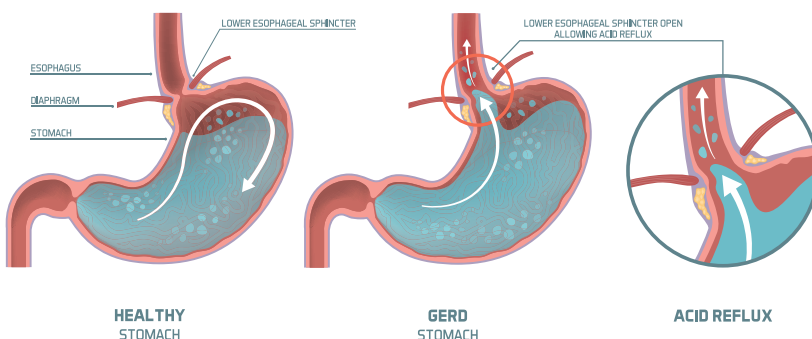
GERD is a severe type of acid reflux disease caused by a weak lower esophageal sphincter, or LES. This sphincter works like a trapdoor — when the stomach is empty, it opens and lets food in. Once the stomach is full, the LES closes to stop acid and bile from leaving the stomach.

In people with GERD, the LES is weak and either doesn't close completely or may open at inappropriate times. As a result, acid and bile can flow back up into the esophagus, especially while lying down.

In the short term, GERD can cause discomfort and frequent heartburn. Other symptoms include difficulty swallowing, wheezing and chest pain.

Over the long term, it can do more damage. Esophagitis, Barrett's esophagus, strictures and even esophageal cancer can all stem from acid damage to the esophagus. The best way to avoid these conditions is to take steps to reduce and eliminate GERD symptoms.

If you notice that your GERD symptoms are interfering with your daily life or drastically restricting what you can eat, consider talking with your doctor about treatment options.



Avoid fast food



Stop eating 3–4 hours before bed



Stay at a healthy weight



Eat smaller meals



Avoid alcohol and caffeine



Steer clear of tobacco



Stay away from spicy food



Wear loose-fitting clothing



Exercise regularly



Try not to stress

What you eat daily affects your gut health — and luckily, eating a diet that's good for your gut doesn't have to be difficult.

The foods you eat affect the type of bacteria that develop in your stomach. And eating a wide range of healthy foods creates a healthy balance of this bacteria, which is instrumental in how your body digests nutrients.

Mix it up by eating a variety of fresh foods, including:

- Vegetables
- Beans and legumes
- Olive oil
- Fruits
- Fermented foods (like yogurt)
- Whole grains

This recipe brings some of the above together in perfect harmony. Yogurt (a fermented food) paired with fruit and granola (use one made with whole grains) can be a gut-healthy breakfast or snack. Enjoy the easy recipe below!



Fruit and yogurt parfait

Serves 4

This parfait contains good-for-your-gut probiotics, protein, antioxidant-rich berries and high-fiber granola. Be sure to serve immediately after making it so the granola stays crunchy.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups low-fat or fat-free vanilla Greek yogurt
- 1 cup chopped strawberries
- 1 cup blueberries
- 1 cup granola with whole grains (store-bought or homemade)

Directions:

1. Layer $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Greek yogurt into the bottom of four dishes.
2. Combine strawberries and blueberries. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup berries on top of yogurt, followed by $\frac{1}{4}$ cup granola.
3. Repeat layers again: yogurt, berries, granola.



When you need help with GI issues, our team offers you the latest methods in treatment and diagnosis.

Find a GI care center near you:

Electric Avenue Medical Center

310 Electric Ave., Suites 100, 150 & 240
Lewistown, PA 17044

**Geisinger Gastroenterology/Endoscopy
Montoursville**

10 Choate Circle
Montoursville, PA 17754

Geisinger Gray's Woods (State College)

132 Abigail Lane
Port Matilda, PA 16870

Geisinger Holy Spirit Silver Creek Center

335 Lambs Gap Road
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

Geisinger Lock Haven

955 Bellefonte Ave.
Lock Haven, PA 17745

Geisinger Mountain Top

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Mountain Top, PA 18707

Geisinger Pediatric Specialty Dunmore

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Dunmore, PA 18512

Geisinger Pediatrics Forty Fort

190 Welles St., Suite 122
Forty Fort, PA 18704

Geisinger Pediatrics Hanover Street

166 Hanover St., Suite 105
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18704

Geisinger Philipsburg

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Philipsburg, PA 16866

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529 Terry Reiley Way
Pottsville, PA 17901

Geisinger Susquehanna University*

620 University Ave.
Selinsgrove, PA 17870

Geisinger Janet Weis Children's Hospital

100 N. Academy Ave.
Danville, PA 17822

Pediatric Specialty Services South Williamsport

204 Curtin St. South
Williamsport, PA 17702

Call today for an appointment at 800-275-6401 or visit [geisinger.org/GICare](https://www.geisinger.org/GICare).

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