

What your body may be telling you about your health

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Do you have a persistent cough, or do you feel like your hair is thinning? These issues may signal that you need to visit a doctor. Baylor College of Medicine expert Isabel Valdez, a physician assistant and instructor of family and community medicine, discusses some clues your body may giving you about your health.

Cough

"Often when patients come in with a [cough](#) that has been going on for several months and there are no signs of an infection, we consider rare causes like acid reflux," Valdez said. "Many people don't usually associate a cough with [acid reflux](#) but it is one of the top causes of cough when you have stomach problems like indigestion."

A cough also could be a sign of allergies. A [chronic cough](#) can develop over time because mucus is draining through the back of the throat and irritating it.

Certain blood pressure medications also can cause a cough so it is important to visit with your doctor if you are on these medications and develop a cough.

Unintentional weight loss

If you are experiencing unintentional [weight loss](#), it is a good idea to visit

your doctor and have bloodwork done to check for a deficiency, blood sugar problems or thyroid issues, Valdez explained.

Weight loss can be a sign of a problem in patients that already have other medical conditions such as diabetes. If a person with diabetes notices that they are losing weight, it could mean that their blood sugars levels are not in the range of what they should be or it could be suggestive of a complication of their diabetes.

"Although rare, severe and sudden weight loss can signal that a cancer such as leukemia is present," Valdez said. "If this is suspected, we do a blood test called a complete blood count."

Changes in bowel movements

If you are having frequent stomach aches or changes in the bowels, Valdez said it could signal that you have developed an intolerance to a certain food that you are eating.

Bowel habits also can change if you have been on antibiotics, she said. This can occur because antibiotics, especially strong ones, can kill off the good bacteria that help keep your gut flora balanced so it is important to replace that good bacteria with probiotics.

Bowel problems and stomach aches can be caused by stress or anxiety as well. Sometimes when you are extremely anxious, you may eat or drink foods that are less healthy for you, which can irritate the lining of your stomach or even change your [bowel movements](#).

Thinning hair

If you feel like your [hair](#) is thinning and falling out excessively, this

could be a signal that there is an issue with your thyroid, she said. Additionally, thinning hair or changes in the hair can be a sign of vitamin or nutritional deficiency.

If you have had any major change, such as a pregnancy or are recovering from a surgery, your hair can thin out because your body is focusing all of its energies into helping you heal, which takes away from its ability to produce the cells that help your hair grow at the rate it usually would.

Changes with your skin

Valdez said that if you have dry skin, this could mean that there may be an issue with your thyroid. However, dry skin also can be a sign that your body is not properly hydrated.

If you notice rashes that are pink in color on your legs, particularly near the ankles, that do not cause itching or discomfort, it is important that you see your doctor to make sure that you are not having circulation issues. These patches of pink are called venous stasis dermatitis.

If you notice that you are bleeding easily and frequently or bruises take too long to heal, it could mean that you are having a clotting issue that may require testing.

"While it can be tempting to put off getting these issues checked out until your yearly physical, it is extremely important that if you have had any unusual symptoms for more than a month to go visit your healthcare provider sooner rather than later," Valdez said. "However, if you've had a problem and you are using your physical as a way to broach that issue with your doctor, mention the issue as soon as your doctor walks in so that your doctor can use the time with you appropriately and make the right decisions as far as testing and follow-up."

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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