

5 reasons to see a gastroenterologist

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If you regularly experience common ailments—like heartburn or stomachaches that don't improve with over-the-counter medications, or you have severe pain or other symptoms—a gastroenterologist could help.

Often called a GI doctor, a gastroenterologist treats diseases and disorders of the digestive tract and liver. These specialists treat cancers,

[liver disease](#), heartburn, problems with the gallbladder, Crohn's disease, [ulcerative colitis](#), [irritable bowel syndrome](#), [internal bleeding](#), celiac disease and other disorders. A GI doctor can also educate you about how to keep your digestive system healthy.

When should you see a gastroenterologist? Your primary care provider may refer you to a GI specialist if you have any of the following:

- You have heartburn that does not get better with over-the-counter medicines. Although occasional heartburn is common, you should seek help if you also have nausea, vomiting or problems swallowing or if your heartburn keeps you up at night.
- You have persistent or severe stomach pain. Abdominal discomfort is typically caused by a stomach virus, indigestion or gas. More [severe pain](#) may indicate a blockage of the intestines.
- There's blood in your stool. Whether it's red or black, blood in the stool is something you need to get checked. It could indicate bleeding in the digestive tract.
- Food is stuck in your esophagus. This may feel like a lump in your throat and can cause difficult, painful swallowing. It could also cause a loss of appetite or vomiting and may be a sign of a disease or some sort of abnormality.
- You are 45. Even if you feel well and have no symptoms, the American Cancer Society now recommends that you get your first screening colonoscopy at age 45—and every 10 years after that. "Colonoscopies save lives," says Tommy Pacana, MD, a gastroenterologist with Rush Copley Gastroenterology. "This procedure can find cancer early when it is easier to treat. That's why it is best to be tested before you even have symptoms."

If you have any of these symptoms or [risk factors](#), talk to your primary care provider about whether you should see a GI specialist.

Provided by Rush University Medical Center

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