



Your
GASTROENTEROLOGIST
— A Digestive Specialist

A patient's guide from your doctor and



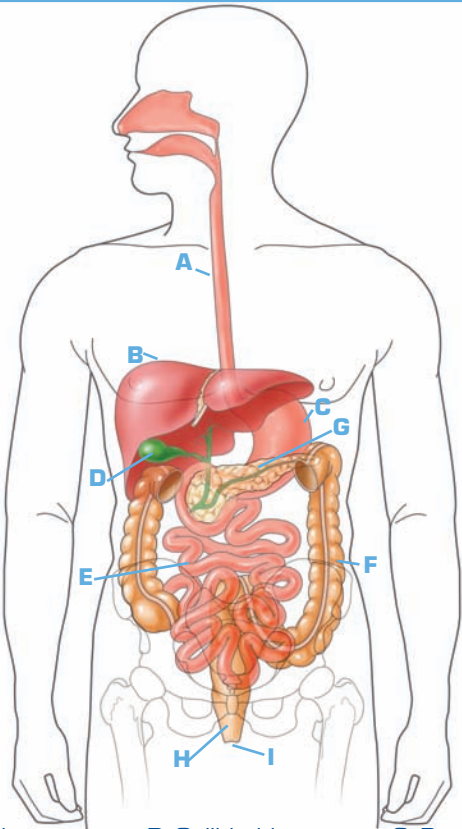
What Is a Gastroenterologist?

A gastroenterologist is a specialist in the digestive system.

The digestive system includes the 25-foot-long tube that processes food and nutrients, plus the liver, pancreas and gallbladder. These organs break down and absorb the food we eat so that the nutrients can be transported into the blood stream and delivered to cells throughout the body.

“Good” digestive health indicates an ability to process nutrients through properly functioning gastrointestinal organs, including the stomach, intestine, liver, pancreas and gallbladder. When these organs do not function properly, patients may need to see a gastroenterologist.

Your Digestive System



A. Esophagus

B. Liver

C. Stomach

D. Gallbladder

E. Small Intestine

F. Large Intestine

G. Pancreas

H. Rectum

I. Anus

Digestive Health Concerns? See a Gastroenterologist

Gastroenterologists, or “GI doctors,” are medical specialists with extensive training in diseases of the digestive tract.

People with digestive health conditions often benefit from being treated by a health-care provider who specializes in helping people with these conditions. Often, gastroenterologists lead teams of **nurse practitioners** (NPs) or **physician assistants** (PAs) who also focus on digestive health.



Gastroenterologists, NPs and PAs can listen to your problems, perform tests to make a diagnosis, answer your questions and prescribe the best course of treatment to help you feel better.

Gastroenterologists, NPs and PAs who are members of the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) demonstrate an exceptional level of commitment to excellence in gastroenterological research, education and clinical practice.

Gastroenterologists Are Highly Trained Physicians

Gastroenterologists complete four years of medical school and three years of internal medicine residency, followed by a fellowship in gastroenterology. The rigorous fellowship takes two to four years to complete and ensures the physician is uniquely and highly qualified to diagnose and treat disorders of the digestive tract.

During a GI fellowship, doctors learn about disorders of the GI tract including: screening for gastrointestinal cancers, esophageal problems, GERD, ulcer disease and *Helicobacter pylori*, gallbladder and bile duct diseases, pancreas disorders, cellular and molecular physiology, endoscopy, ethics, medical economics and system-based practice, geriatric gastroenterology, liver disease and pathology, inflammatory diseases of the intestines, infections of the intestines, motility and functional illnesses, nutrition and obesity, pediatric gastroenterology, radiology, research, surgery, women’s health issues, and cancers of the esophagus, stomach, liver, pancreas, small intestines and colon.

Illnesses Treated by Gastroenterologists

In addition to rare disorders of the digestive system, gastroenterologists diagnose or treat the following common conditions:

- ▶ Colorectal cancer, including determining whether you have a genetic risk
- ▶ Viral hepatitis
- ▶ Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- ▶ Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), including Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis
- ▶ Diverticulitis, diverticulosis and ischemic bowel disease
- ▶ Celiac disease and food intolerances
- ▶ Heartburn and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)
- ▶ Chronic vomiting and gastroparesis
- ▶ Functional illness, such as constipation, diarrhea, vomiting, belching and flatulence
- ▶ Peptic ulcer disease and *Helicobacter pylori*
- ▶ Acute and chronic pancreatitis
- ▶ Gallbladder disease
- ▶ Appendicitis
- ▶ Nutritional deficiencies
- ▶ Obesity
- ▶ Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease
- ▶ Cirrhosis
- ▶ GI infections caused by viruses, bacteria, fungi and protozoa

If you have any of these conditions, a gastroenterologist is the best physician for you to see.

Tests Performed by a GI Doctor

Gastroenterologists use a number of techniques to view the organs of the digestive tract. The most common tests they perform are colonoscopy and upper-GI endoscopy (EGD).

Colonoscopy is performed to examine the large intestine for disease, most commonly colorectal cancer. Everyone age 50 and older should be screened for colorectal cancer. When performing a colonoscopy, the gastroenterologist uses a long, thin, flexible tube with a tiny video camera and a light on the end — called the colonoscope — to view the entire colon and rectum and check for polyps, inflammatory changes or cancer. If polyps are found, they often can be removed with this procedure.

Endoscopy can be helpful in the evaluation or diagnosis of various problems, including difficult or painful swallowing, pain in the stomach or abdomen, bleeding, ulcers, tumors, and problems with the gallbladder, pancreas and bile ducts. An endoscope is a long, thin, flexible tube with a tiny video camera and light on the end. By adjusting the controls on the endoscope, the gastroenterologist can safely guide the instrument to carefully examine the inside lining of the upper digestive system. In some cases, GIs can treat digestive conditions through the endoscope.

Some gastroenterologists perform newer tests to examine the GI tract, such as CT colonography where the GI doctor can inspect radiological images of the colon to check for polyps and cancers, and capsule endoscopy, during which the patient swallows a camera that records images of the GI tract.

**For digestive health issues,
it's best to see a doctor who
specializes in the digestive tract
— a gastroenterologist.**

Go to www.gastro.org/patient for more information on digestive health and tests performed by gastroenterologists and to find an AGA member physician in your area.

The American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) is dedicated to the mission of advancing the science and practice of gastroenterology. Founded in 1897, the AGA is one of the oldest medical-specialty societies in the U.S. Our 16,000 members include physicians and scientists who research, diagnose and treat disorders of the gastrointestinal tract and liver. The AGA Institute runs the organization's practice, research and educational programs.

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The Digestive Health Initiative® (DHI) is an AGA Institute initiative that offers educational programs on digestive disorders for individuals who are affected by a digestive disease, in an effort to educate the larger health-care community.

This brochure was produced by the AGA Institute and funded by a grant from Takeda Pharmaceuticals North America, Inc.



**For more information about digestive diseases,
please visit the AGA Web site at www.gastro.org.**

The AGA Institute offers the information in these brochures for educational purposes to provide accurate and helpful health information for the general public. This information is not intended as medical advice and should not be used for diagnosis. The information in these brochures should not be considered a replacement for consultation with a health-care professional. If you have questions or concerns about the information found in these brochures, please contact your health-care provider. We encourage you to use the information and questions in these brochures with your health-care provider(s) as a way of creating a dialogue and partnership about your condition and your treatment.