



Information about Digestive Motility Diseases and Disorders

- ⇒ In normal digestion, peristalsis (wave-like coordinated contractions) propels food and liquid content throughout the digestive tract. In people having a digestive motility disease or disorder, these contractions become impaired.
- ⇒ Depending on the area of the digestive tract that is involved, this can lead to symptoms such as esophageal or abdominal pain, difficulty swallowing, reflux, burping, regurgitation, a feeling of early fullness, abdominal swelling, constipation, diarrhea, excessive gas, nausea, and vomiting, etc.
- ⇒ There are many different types of digestive motility diseases and disorders. Some, only affect one part of the digestive tract, however, others may include or progress to multiple areas within the digestive tract. In certain instances, motility diseases may also affect the urinary system.
- ⇒ Digestive motility diseases and disorders can affect anyone at any age. Many patients may not appear ill, even though their symptoms can be extremely debilitating and life-changing.
- ⇒ In many cases, the symptoms of digestive motility diseases and disorders do not seem to follow any particular pattern and can be quite unpredictable in nature. The patient may feel reasonably well one minute, and the next minute be in excruciating pain. Patients may be able to eat a certain food one day without any problem, and the next time, they may experience escalating symptoms.
- ⇒ It can be difficult to make plans and to socialize because of the uncertainty as to when the symptoms might become aggravated.
- ⇒ Some patients may develop food aversions, fear, anxiety, and even depression as a result of trying to cope with their chronic illness.
- ⇒ The impact that digestive motility diseases and disorders can have, not only on the patient, but his/her family as well, can be most profound.
- ⇒ Treatment is oftentimes, individual in nature, and in some cases, there are no adequate treatments available. Patients can sometimes feel very much alone in their suffering.
- ⇒ It can be extremely frustrating for the patient and family members when others don't understand or belittle what the patient is going through.
- ⇒ The life of a digestive motility patient is filled with many physical and emotional challenges on a daily basis. It can be life-altering and in some cases, may be extremely debilitating.

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Examples of Digestive Motility Diseases & Disorders

Achalasia is a digestive motility disease affecting the esophagus. Patients with achalasia have an absence of peristalsis (digestive contractions) in the smooth muscle of the esophagus. There may also be incomplete relaxation of the lower esophageal sphincter upon swallowing. Symptoms may include: difficulty swallowing solids and liquids, chest pain (cardio-spasm) either during swallowing or at random times, night coughing, regurgitation, and the inhalation of food into the lungs.

Chronic Intestinal Pseudo-Obstruction (CIP) is a rare digestive motility disease that may affect the nerves and/or muscles of the digestive tract. Symptoms may include: severe abdominal pain, constipation and/or diarrhea, nausea and/or vomiting, weight loss/weight gain, abdominal distention (belly swelling), early satiety (fullness), gastroparesis, esophageal problems, malnutrition, lethargy, and difficulty with urination. In addition, patients may experience low back pain, muscular and/or joint pain, as well as many other unexplained and complex symptoms affecting the entire body.

Diffuse Esophageal Spasm (DES) presents itself with very disorganized and uncoordinated peristaltic contractions in the esophagus. Sometimes the pain can be so severe, that it mimics the symptoms of a heart attack. Pain can be felt in the chest and radiate through the upper back, arm, and jaw. Very cold or hot liquids, as well as lifting or exerting oneself, can worsen the pain. A painful attack may occur any time, both day and night and may last from minutes to hours. It may also reoccur multiple times.

Dumping Syndrome is a condition in which stomach content empties at a very rapid pace into the small intestine. Symptoms may include epigastric bloating, cramping, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, explosive diarrhea, gas, profuse sweating, dizziness, flushing, weakness, palpitations, blood pressure variants, weight loss, and nutritional deficiencies.

Fecal Incontinence is the loss of bowel movement control. Fecal incontinence can occur as a result of a variety of reasons including diarrhea, age, rectal prolapse, paralysis, tumors, injuries, impaction, childbirth, dementia, and digestive motility diseases and disorders.

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) occurs as a result of stomach content flowing backwards into the esophagus. Symptoms may include burning or sharp pain, esophageal inflammation, acute and chronic heartburn which may worsen when the patient eats, bends, lifts, or lies down, regurgitation of gastric contents and a sour taste in the mouth, excessive salivation, difficulty swallowing, noncardiac chest pain, laryngitis, and cough.

Gastroparesis is a motility disease which affects the stomach. With gastroparesis, the movement of food through the stomach to the small intestine is delayed. Symptoms can include, early satiety (fullness), nausea, vomiting, abdominal discomfort and abdominal distention (swelling). Some patients may experience pain with varying degrees of intensity, as well as weight loss and vomiting food eaten a few hours to several hours beforehand.

Hirschsprung's Disease is also known as congenital megacolon. The nerves in the large intestine are missing resulting in fecal backup, constipation, and vomiting.

Intestinal Ischemia is a restriction of blood flow to the intestinal tract. Depending on the type of intestinal ischemia, symptoms can range from sudden, mild, crampy left-sided predominant abdominal pain to sudden severe abdominal pain, urgent need to move bowels, abdominal tenderness, blood in stool, weight loss, nausea, and bloating.

Intestinal Obstruction is a blockage that stops the passage of intestinal content through the digestive tract. Symptoms may include pain in the abdomen, bloating, vomiting, severe constipation, diarrhea (partial obstruction), fever, absent bowel sounds or loud and high pitched bowel sounds.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a motility disorder characterized by a group of symptoms which include abdominal pain, cramping or discomfort, diarrhea and or constipation, frequent bowel movements and bloating. It is considered a functional disorder because no structural cause can be found.

Neuronal Intestinal Dysplasia (NID) is a digestive motility disorder in which there is an abnormality in the nerve cells (ganglion) resulting in slow transit. An indicator may be a delayed passing of meconium. Symptoms may include constipation, uncontrollable soiling, abdominal pain, nausea, loss of appetite, diarrhea, and blood in stool.

Nutcracker Esophagus is a motility disorder which affects the muscles or nerves of the esophagus. It is also referred to as one of the esophageal spastic motor disorders. Symptoms may include: dysphagia (difficulty swallowing), chest pain, and the feeling of food being stuck in the throat.

Short Bowel Syndrome (SBS) is a failure of the gastrointestinal tract to absorb important nutrients necessary for normal growth and development. This may occur as a result of a small bowel resection or multiple bowel resections, intestinal atresia (defect) or volvulus (the twisting of the bowel on itself), Crohn's disease, trauma, Hirschsprung's Disease and chronic intestinal pseudo-obstruction. The difficult symptoms may include diarrhea, bacterial overgrowth, gallstones, renal stones, and gastric hypersecretion.

Small Bowel Bacterial Overgrowth (SBBO) occurs as result of bacteria, which typically resides in the colon (lower intestine), being present in the small bowel (upper intestine). Symptoms may include diarrhea, anemia, abdominal pain, edema, and weight loss.

Sphincter of Oddi Dysfunction occurs when this muscular valve, which controls the flow of bile and pancreatic juices into the duodenum, does not function properly. The result is a back-up of these digestive juices. Symptoms may include, severe, sharp abdominal pain, which may also radiate to the back or shoulder blades. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, fever, chills, and diarrhea.

The information contained in this publication has been reviewed by members of the AGMD Medical Advisory Board.

The material contained in this information sheet should be used as a reference guide. Patients are urged to contact their physician regarding any concerns or questions relating to their health or the material presented in this information sheet.

If you would like to learn more about digestive motility diseases and disorders, please contact the Association of Gastrointestinal Motility Disorders, Inc. (AGMD). It would be a privilege for us to assist you.