Pediatric Gastroenterology Conditions Evaluated and Treated

Having a child suffer with abdominal pain, chronic eating problems, or other gastrointestinal disorders can be a very trying time for a parent. At University of Utah Health Care our pediatric gastrointestinal specialists will walk you through your child’s diagnosis and develop a comprehensive treatment plan. Our specialists work closely with parents and primary care providers, to become partners in your child's care and treatment.

Our patients include newborns to adolescents and we offer both inpatient and outpatient consultations. We specialize in treating children for common and complex gastrointestinal, liver or growth disorders and provide nutritional support when necessary.

**Gastroenterology:** Branch of medicine that deals with disorders of the stomach and intestines.

**Conditions Evaluated and Treated:**

- **Colic:** Colic is a problem that affects some babies during the first 3 to 4 months of life. It is defined by the "rule of three": crying at least 3 hours per day, more than 3 days per week, and for 3 weeks duration or more. It can be very stressful and frustrating to parents. Colic usually begins suddenly, with loud and mostly continuous crying.

- **Diarrhea:** Diarrhea is defined either as watery stool or increased frequency (or both) when compared to a normal amount. It is a common problem that may last a few days and disappear on its own.

  Diarrhea may be:

  • Acute (short-term, usually lasting several days), which is usually related to bacterial or viral infections.

  • Chronic (long-term, lasting longer than four weeks), which may have a variety of causes, such as irritable bowel syndrome, or may be due to chronic diseases such as ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, or celiac disease. Giardia may also cause chronic diarrhea.

- **Food Allergies:** A food allergy is an abnormal response of the body to a certain food. This is different from a food intolerance, which does not affect the immune system, although some of the same symptoms may be present.

- **Lactose Intolerance:** Lactose intolerance is a condition caused when a person can't make enough of an enzyme called lactase. Without enough lactase, the body can't digest lactose, a sugar found in milk and milk products.

  Lactase is normally made by cells lining the small intestine where it breaks lactose down into a form that can be absorbed by the blood. A lack of lactase can cause uncomfortable
symptoms for some people. Those who do have symptoms are said to be lactose intolerant.

- The disorder affects some groups of people more than others:
  
  • African-American, Jewish, Mexican-American, Native American, and Asian-American adults are commonly lactose intolerant.

  Lactose intolerance is least common among people with a northern European heritage.

- **Chronic Constipation:** Constipation is a condition in which a person has uncomfortable or infrequent bowel movements. Generally, a person is considered to be constipated when bowel movements result in passage of small amounts of hard, dry stool, usually fewer than three times a week. However, normal stool elimination may consist of having a bowel movement three times a day or three times a week; it depends on the person. About 4 million people in the United States have frequent constipation. Constipation is the most common gastrointestinal complaint, resulting in 2.5 million doctor visits annually.

- **Irritable Bowel Syndrome:** Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is an intestinal disorder that causes the following:

  • Crampy pain
  • Gassiness
  • Bloating
  • Changes in bowel habits

  IBS has inaccurately been called by many names, including the following:

  • Colitis
  • Mucous colitis
  • Spastic colon
  • Spastic bowel
  • Functional bowel disease

  IBS is a functional disorder because there is no sign of disease when the colon is examined. Because doctors have been unable to find an organic cause, IBS often has been thought to be caused by emotional conflict or stress. While stress may worsen IBS symptoms, research suggests that other factors also are important.

  IBS often causes a great deal of discomfort and distress, but it is not believed to:

  • Cause permanent harm to the intestines.
• Lead to intestinal bleeding of the bowel.
• Lead to a serious disease such as cancer.

It has not been shown to lead to serious, organic diseases, nor has a link been established between IBS and inflammatory bowel diseases such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis.

• **Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)/Chronic Heartburn/Swallowing Disorders:** Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a digestive disorder that is caused by gastric acid flowing from the stomach into the esophagus. Gastroesophageal refers to the stomach and esophagus, and reflux means to flow back or return. Gastroesophageal reflux (GER) is the return of acidic stomach juices, or food and fluids, back up into the esophagus.

• **Esophageal Diseases:** Conditions that affect the esophagus may feel like burning sensations in the chest or that something is caught in their esophagus. Specialists in our gastroenterology clinic are expert at diagnosing and treating these conditions, as well as developing a customized treatment plan for you.

Conditions and Disease of the esophagus are:

**Achalasia:** Achalasia is a disorder that affects your esophagus, which is the swallowing tube that connects the back of your throat to your stomach. If you have achalasia, your esophagus does not sufficiently push food or liquid into your stomach. In addition, the ring of muscle that circles the lower portion of your esophagus does not relax enough to let food and liquid pass through easily. In fact, achalasia means "failure to relax."

Achalasia usually develops slowly, making it harder for you to swallow food and beverages. It's caused by loss of the nerve cells that control the swallowing muscles in the esophagus. Why these nerve cells degenerate, however, isn't known. Although achalasia has no cure, symptoms can be controlled with treatment.

**Eosinophilic Esophagitis (EoE):** Eosinophilic esophagitis (also known as EoE) is an inflammatory disease of the esophagus which can lead to difficulty swallowing (dysphagia) or food getting stuck in the esophagus. It is characterized by a large number of eosinophils (a type of white blood cell) found in the esophagus. Previously considered to be a rare disease, EoE is emerging as a leading cause of food impaction and difficulty swallowing. EoE is diagnosed through biopsies taken during an upper endoscopy (EGD).

**Esophagitis:** Esophagitis is the irritation and inflammation of the lining of your esophagus, or food pipe. Because the lining of the esophagus is sensitive, many things can cause swelling and irritation.

- **Inflammatory Bowel Disease**: There are two types of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD):

  1. **Crohn’s disease**: Crohn's disease is an inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) that is a chronic condition that may recur at various times over a lifetime. It usually involves the small intestine, most often the lower part called the ileum. However, in some cases, both the small and large intestine are affected. Sometimes, inflammation may also affect the entire digestive tract, including the mouth, esophagus, stomach, duodenum, appendix, or anus.

     Crohn's disease affects males and females equally. It appears to run in some families, with about 20 percent of people with Crohn's disease having a blood relative with some form of inflammatory bowel disease.

  2. **Ulcerative Colitis**: Ulcerative colitis is an inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) in which the inner lining of the large intestine (colon or bowel) and rectum become inflamed. Inflammation usually begins in the rectum and lower (sigmoid) intestine and spreads upward to the entire colon. Ulcerative colitis rarely affects the small intestine, except for the lower section, the ileum.

     The inflammation causes diarrhea, or frequent emptying of the colon. As cells on the surface of the lining of the colon die and slough off, ulcers (open sores) form and may cause the discharge of pus and mucus, in addition to bleeding.

     Although children and older people sometimes develop ulcerative colitis, it most often starts between the ages of 15 and 30. It affects males and females equally and appears to run in some families.

     Ulcerative colitis requires long-term medical care. There may be remissions--periods when the symptoms go away--that last for months or even years. However, symptoms eventually return.

     Only in rare cases, when complications occur, is the disease fatal. If only the rectum and lower colon are involved, the risk of cancer is not higher than normal. However, the risk of colon cancer is greater than normal in patients with widespread ulcerative colitis.

- **Liver Disease**:

- **Motility Disorders**: Motility disorders are disorders where the gastrointestinal tract has lost its ability to coordinate the muscles that perform common functions, such as swallowing or moving food and waste through the gastrointestinal tract. These muscles are located in the esophagus, stomach, and small intestine.

- **Testing Done**:

  - **EGD**: A scope inserted through the mouth under sedation, which examines the lining of the esophagus, stomach and first part of the small intestine.

**Colonoscopy**: A scope inserted through the rectum under sedation, which examines the lining of the large intestines.