

Top health tips gastroenterologists want you to know

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Digestive health has taken center stage in the U.S. in recent years, as digestive conditions are now so common that just about everyone knows someone with one or more of them: gastric reflux, lactose intolerance, celiac disease, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, inflammatory bowel disease, irritable bowel syndrome ... the list goes on.

Below you will find AMA news articles outlining some important health tips that gastroenterologists want their patients to know. They are drawn from the AMA's What Doctors Want Patients to Know™ series, which provides physicians with a platform to share what they want patients to understand about today's health care headlines.

1 Inflammatory bowel disease doesn't have to mean surgery

Some people are faced with having to rearrange their lives around the symptoms of painful abdominal cramping, persistent diarrhea and rectal bleeding. But that doesn't have to be the case. These uncomfortable symptoms may indicate inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Receiving a proper diagnosis of IBD and understanding how to find relief will be key to getting back to enjoying daily activities without the threat of disruptive chronic inflammation.

IBD is an umbrella term that is used to describe disorders that cause chronic inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract, according to the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation. The two most common forms of IBD are Crohn's disease and

ulcerative colitis, with about 3.1 million adults in the U.S. diagnosed with one form of the disease. Two gastroenterologists detailed what patients need to know about inflammatory bowel disease—which should not be confused with irritable bowel syndrome.

2 To clear up irritable bowel syndrome, focus on diet first

Digestive discomfort has become an all-too-common complaint. And one condition that stands out for its bewildering array of symptoms and challenges is irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). It is a chronic gastrointestinal disorder that can disrupt daily routines, dampen quality of life for patients with IBS feeling frustrated and isolated.

But as understanding of the condition continues to evolve, so does the approach to managing and living with irritable bowel syndrome. Knowing what to keep in mind will help patients navigate life's digestive maze despite the complexities of IBS. Learn what patients need to know about managing—and living with—this chronic disabling disorder.

3 To maintain gut health, pay attention to bowel pattern changes

A healthy gut is essential for overall health and well-being, establishing proper digestion, metabolism and immunity. Meanwhile, poor gut health has been linked to a range of health conditions, such as inflammatory bowel disease, irritable bowel syndrome, allergies and mental health disorders. But understanding how to maintain a healthy gut can set patients' digestive health on the right track.

Gut health refers to the well-being of the digestive system, which is responsible for breaking down food, absorbing nutrients and eliminating waste from the body. It is home to trillions of microorganisms—including bacteria, viruses and

fungi—that are collectively known as the gut microbiome. A gastroenterologist discusses the importance of gut health, beginning with what to do if you notice symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome.

4 Colon cancer screening should be top of mind for people over 50

Colorectal cancer—which refers to cancer of the colon or the rectum—is the second leading cause of cancer death in the U.S., and it doesn’t seem to show any signs of slowing. In fact, while most cases are still diagnosed in people over 50, more people are being diagnosed at younger ages. Nevertheless, only about 30% of eligible patients in the U.S. have been screened for colorectal cancer.

An internist and a gastroenterologist took time to discuss what patients need to know about colorectal cancer. Foremost among them: It’s a very common cancer among adults. In fact, Americans over 45 are considered susceptible enough to warrant screening.

When it comes to effective doctor-patient communication, it's important that both parties are speaking from a base of shared knowledge. The AMA's What Doctors Want Patients to Know™ series explores dozens of health topics, including [Lyme disease](#), [norovirus](#) and [anti-obesity medications](#).