Digestive System Disorders

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**Abstract**

Digestive system disorders are common illnesses. These illnesses are usually not significant, but they can lead to greater complications. This paper dicusses four types of digestive system disorders: gastric ulcers, Crohn’s disease, gallstones, and colon polyps. Each disorder has similar characteristics and affects the digestive in similar ways.

**Summary**

Four major types of digestive system disorders are gastric ulcers, Crohn’s disease, gallstones, and colon polyps. Gastric ulcers are open sores in the lining of the stomach. It can lead to a burning pain and is caused by an increase in acid or decrease in mucus in the stomach. Crohn’s disease is an inflammatory bowel disease that causes inflammation in different parts of the digestive tract. Gallstones are rock-like deposits of cholesterol or other things in the gallbladder. Many people have gallstones and are unaware of it; however, they can become serious if they do begin to cause symptoms. Finally, colon polyps are clumps of cells that are formed in the colon. While the symptoms of colon polyps can be serious, they lead to colon cancer- a much more serious issue.

The digestive system, just like all other systems of the body, is susceptible to having problems. A few of these problems include gastric ulcers, Crohn’s disease, gallstones, and polyps. Each disorder has some similar characteristics and some characteristics that differ.

One digestive disorder that can occur is called gastric ulcers. Gastric ulcers are a more specific type of peptic ulcers. Peptic ulcers are sores that open up in the lining of different parts of the alimentary canal. These parts include the esophagus, stomach, and small intestine. Gastric ulcers are peptic ulcers that occur in the stomach. Gastric ulcers, or all types of peptic ulcers for that matter, are caused by an increase in acids or a decrease in mucus inside the digestive tract. The mucus in the digestive tract normally protects the lining from acid, but if the amount of mucus decreases or the amount of acid is too much, the mucus cannot protect the lining. This causes the holes in the lining. The holes in the lining of the stomach will most often cause a burning pain, but they can also cause vomiting of blood, nausea or vomiting, weight loss, and appetite changes (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2011).

In order to diagnose gastric ulcers, a doctor might perform blood tests, endoscopy, biopsy, or x-rays of the upper digestive system. When diagnosed, a doctor will prescribe medication or antacids in order to help heal the ulcer. It is important to get a gastric ulcer treated because, if gone untreated, it can lead to internal bleeding, infection, or cause scar tissue, all of which can lead to much greater problems (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2011).

Some causes of gastric ulcers include different types of bacteria extracted from food and water and different types of medication including common medicines like aspirin and ibuprofen (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2011). Overuse of these medications will increase risk of gastric ulcers along with smoking, drinking alcohol, and having uncontrollable stress (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2011).

Another digestive system disorder is Crohn’s disease. Crohn’s disease describes a chronic inflammatory bowel disease that causes inflammation. Crohn’s disease is very rare and only affects 2-7 people out of 100,000 (Ehrlich, 2010). Crohn’s disease causes obstructions in the intestines, ulcers, fistulas, and anal fissures. When someone has Crohn’s, they might experience diarrhea, abdominal pain, bloating, fatigue, weight loss, fever, and nausea or vomiting (Ehrlich, 2010). The cause of Crohn’s disease is unknown, although it is speculated that Crohn’s is mostly hereditary as about 25% of people who have Crohn’s disease also have a relative with the disease (Ehrlich, 2010). Some known risk factors for Crohn’s disease includes being Jewish, being of European decent, having a family history of inflammatory bowel disease, smoking, living in urban areas, and unhealthy eating (Ehrlich, 2010).

In order to diagnose Crohn’s, a doctor will perform a colonoscopy, a capsule endoscopy, barium enema, or CT scans. There is no cure for this disease, but treatments can help to control the symptoms. The treatments for Crohn’s include different types of medication, dietary adjustments, and sometimes surgery may be done to remove highly affected areas. If not treated properly, Crohn’s disease can lead to a number of worse diseases and health issues. Therefore, while the disease itself is serious, it must be held in check so that something worse does not come of it.

A third digestive system disorder that people undergo is gallstones. Gallstones are hard deposits that form in the gallbladder. The size of a gallstone may vary from the size of a grain of sand to the size of a golf ball. Gallstones can be composed of different things. The most common type of gallstones are ones made of cholesterol (Vorvick & Longstreth, 2011). Pigment stones are another type of gallstones made of bilirubin and they are caused when red blood cells are being destroyed. Gallstones can cause abdominal pain, fever, yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes, and nausea or vomiting; however, not all gallstones cause symptoms and many people have gallstones without even being aware of it. Sometimes gallstones are found during other medical procedures as coincidence.

A person is more likely to have gallstones if they are a woman, Native American, Hispanic, over 40 years old, have had family members with gallstones, have had a bone marrow or solid organ transplant, diabetes, gallbladder failure, liver cirrhosis, or if they have gone through rapid weight loss (Vorvick & Longstreth, 2011). In order to detect gallstones, a doctor might perform tests such as an ultrasound, CT scan, or other types of scans. To treat gallstones, medication might be prescribed to help dissolve gallstones made of cholesterol and in some cases surgery is needed to remove the gallstones.

One final digestive system disorder is colon polyps. Colon polyps are a clump of cells in the lining of the colon. Most polyps are harmless, but some can cause abdominal pain, changes in bowel habits, rectal bleeding, constipation or diarrhea, and pain or obstruction. Polyps can become cancerous, but most polyps never become cancerous. There are three types of colon polyps: adenomatous, hyperplastic, and inflammatory. Each type has different locations it affects and slightly different characteristics. Polyps are most common in people over 50 years old, as well as in people with inflammatory intestinal conditions, family history of colon polyps, people who use tobacco or drink alcohol, are overweight, or people who are of black or Eastern European decent (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2011).

Colon polyps can lead to colon cancer, so it is important for colon polyps to be diagnosed and treated. In fact, almost all colon cancers develop from colon polyps (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2011). In order to diagnose colon polyps, colonoscopies, blood tests, barium enema, genetic tests, or other tests may be performed by a doctor. Many polyps can be removed during colonoscopies. In some cases, though, surgery is needed.

**References**

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