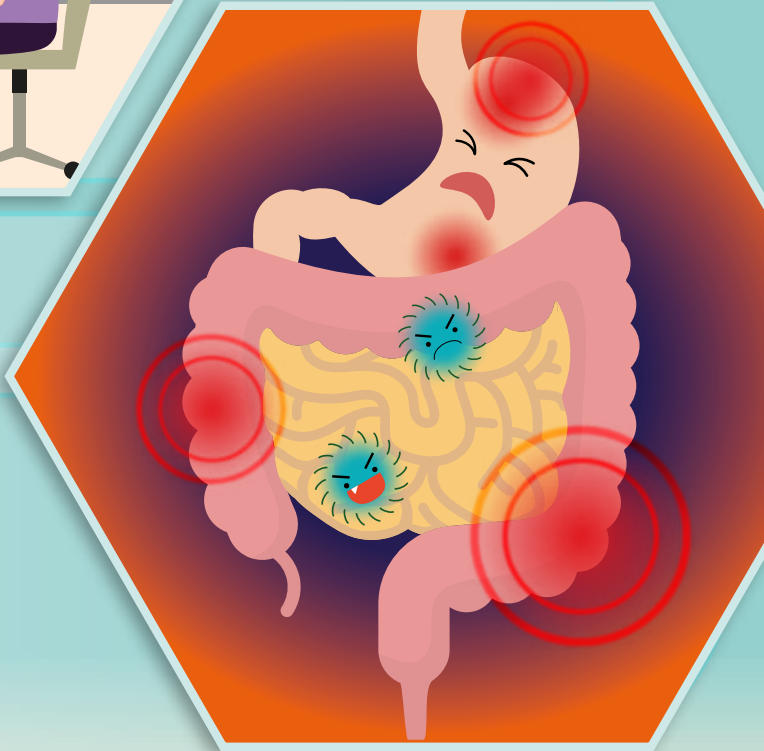


Work and Gastrointestinal Diseases





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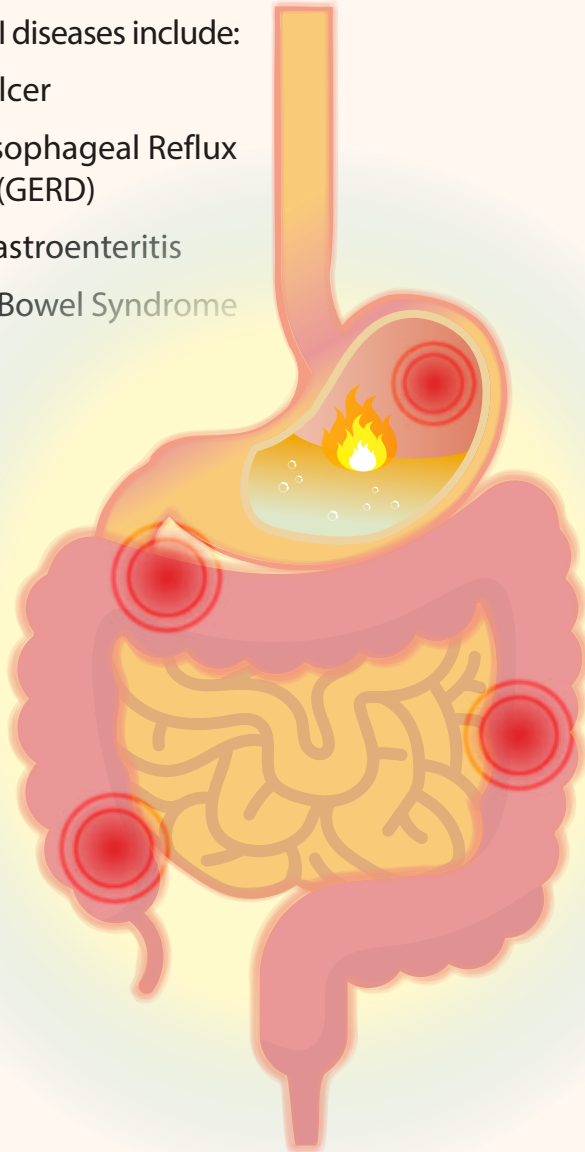
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What are Gastrointestinal (GI) Diseases?

GI diseases generally refer to diseases of the digestive tract. They are commonly found in urbanites.

Common GI diseases include:

- ◆ Peptic Ulcer
- ◆ Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)
- ◆ Acute Gastroenteritis
- ◆ Irritable Bowel Syndrome



Mutual Influence between Work and GI Diseases

Work may affect the normal function of the GI tract and increase the risk of contracting GI diseases, while GI diseases in workers may affect their work performance. Therefore, employers and employees should not ignore the mutual influence between work and GI diseases.

Work-related Factors of GI Diseases

1. Work stress

Excessive work stress may result in tension and alteration of gastric acid secretion and peristalsis, thus increasing the risk of contracting Peptic Ulcer and Irritable Bowel Syndrome.

2. Work pattern

Shift work, night work or irregular work-rest schedules may disturb workers' eating habits.

3. Work nature

In occupations involving care of patients with Acute Gastroenteritis or contact with their excreta, such as elderly home or nursery workers, the risk of getting Acute Gastroenteritis is relatively higher.

4. Work posture

Frequent bending of the body or heavy lifting at work may elevate the intra-abdominal pressure and increase the risk of contracting GERD.



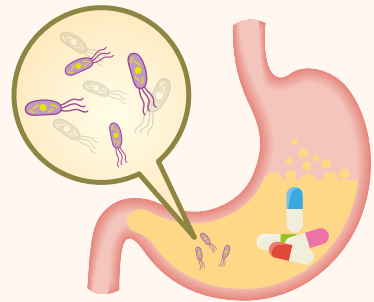
Peptic Ulcer

Peptic Ulcer develops when the lining of the stomach or the first part of the small intestine (duodenum) is damaged by gastric acid, causing erosion or ulceration. In severe cases, patients may develop complications such as bleeding and perforation of the gut and stomach.

Causes

There is an imbalance between the production of gastric acid and the secretion of protective mucus by the lining of the stomach and duodenum. Common causes include:

- ◆ Helicobacter pylori infection
- ◆ Long-term use of aspirin, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), steroids, etc.



Risk Factors

- ◆ Smoking
- ◆ Alcoholism
- ◆ Irregular meal times
- ◆ Stress



Signs and Symptoms

- ◆ Epigastric pain or heartburn
- ◆ Nausea and vomiting
- ◆ Burning sensation and pain in the upper stomach between meals or during night time
- ◆ In severe cases, patients may develop tarry stool or coffee-ground vomitus and weight loss



Treatment

- ◆ Medication
 - Drugs neutralising gastric acid or suppressing its secretion
 - Eradicate *Helicobacter pylori* infection by antibiotics
- ◆ Surgery / Endoscopy
 - Surgical intervention may be required if bleeding or perforation of the gut and stomach occurs

Health Tips on Lifestyle and Work

- ◆ Do not self-medicate with aspirin, NSAIDs or steroids unless prescribed by doctors
- ◆ Quit smoking
- ◆ Reduce or avoid drinking alcoholic beverages
- ◆ Maintain good eating habits
 - Have regular meal times
 - Avoid foods that irritate the gut or stomach
- ◆ Engage in regular physical activities
- ◆ Keep a good mood



Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

Dysfunction of the sphincter at the junction of the oesophagus and stomach causes regurgitation of gastric contents and discomfort. Oesophagitis or oesophageal strictures may occur in severe cases.

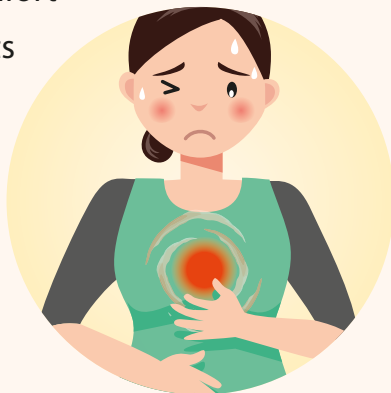
Risk Factors

- ◆ Obesity
- ◆ Smoking
- ◆ Pregnancy
- ◆ Certain diseases (e.g. hiatus hernia) and medications (e.g. calcium channel blockers)
- ◆ Work requiring frequent manual lifting of heavy objects or bending of the body



Signs and Symptoms

- ◆ Heartburn, chest pain or discomfort
- ◆ Regurgitation of gastric contents into the throat or mouth
- ◆ Pain and difficulty in swallowing



Treatment

- ◆ Medication
 - Reduce stomach acid secretion by appropriate drugs
- ◆ Surgery
 - Suitable for severe cases



Health Tips on Lifestyle and Work

- ◆ Maintain a desirable body weight
- ◆ Engage in regular physical activities
- ◆ Quit smoking
- ◆ Maintain good eating habits
 - Have regular meal times
 - Avoid eating before bedtime
 - Avoid foods that are fatty, acidic or spicy
- ◆ Reduce or avoid drinking beverages containing alcohol or caffeine
- ◆ Adopt proper manual lifting techniques and use suitable mechanical aids whenever necessary



Acute Gastroenteritis

Acute Gastroenteritis is usually caused by the ingestion of food or water contaminated by various infective causative agents.

Common causative agents include:

- Bacteria such as Salmonella, Vibrio parahaemolyticus
- Viruses such as Norovirus, Rotavirus

Signs and Symptoms

- ◆ Diarrhoea
- ◆ Colicky abdominal pain
- ◆ Nausea and vomiting
- ◆ Loss of appetite
- ◆ Low grade fever



Treatment

- ◆ Sufficient fluid replenishment to avoid dehydration
- ◆ Take medications at regular times as prescribed by the doctor



Health Tips on Lifestyle and Work

- ◆ Maintain good personal, food and environmental hygiene
- ◆ Wash hands thoroughly with liquid soap and water before handling food or eating, or after using the toilet
- ◆ Adopt the 5 Keys to Food Safety in handling food, i.e. choose safe raw materials; keep hands and utensils clean; separate raw and cooked food; cook thoroughly; and keep food at safe temperature
- ◆ Be sure to cook all foods, particularly seafood and shellfish, thoroughly before consumption
- ◆ Refrain from work and seek medical advice if suffering from vomiting or diarrhoea
- ◆ Employees working in residential care homes and schools should wear gloves when disposing of vomitus and faeces. Clean and disinfect areas or items contaminated with vomitus or faeces thoroughly with diluted household bleach (by adding one part of bleach containing 5.25% sodium hypochlorite to 49 parts of water), and wash hands afterwards



Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable Bowel Syndrome is a functional disorder of the gut causing great discomfort, pain and changes in bowel habits.

Causes

The exact cause of Irritable Bowel Syndrome is unclear.

Risk Factors

- ◆ Stress
- ◆ Bad eating habits
- ◆ Infection or inflammation of the gut



Signs and Symptoms

- ◆ Abdominal pain, bloating or discomfort
- ◆ Constipation, diarrhoea, or constipation alternating with diarrhoea
- ◆ Feeling of incomplete evacuation
- ◆ Copious amount of mucus in stool

Treatment

- ◆ There is no cure for Irritable Bowel Syndrome. Treatment mainly focuses on relieving symptoms such as constipation, diarrhoea or abdominal pain.

Health Tips on Lifestyle and Work

- ◆ Keep a good mood



- ◆ Maintain good eating habits
 - Avoid overeating
 - Eat more fruits and vegetables to increase fibre intake
 - Drink sufficient water
 - Reduce or avoid drinking beverages containing alcohol or caffeine
- ◆ Quit smoking
- ◆ Engage in regular physical activities



Points to Note for Patients with GI Diseases



- ◆ Understand your own illness
- ◆ Follow the treatment advice given by healthcare professionals and attend follow-up consultations regularly
- ◆ If needed, take medications according to the prescribed schedule and amount, and be aware of the therapeutic actions and side effects of the drugs
- ◆ Maintain good eating habits
- ◆ Maintain good personal, food and environmental hygiene
- ◆ Have a regular work-rest schedule
- ◆ Keep a good mood
- ◆ Maintain a desirable body weight and engage in regular physical activities
- ◆ Quit smoking
- ◆ Reduce or avoid drinking beverages containing alcohol or caffeine

Most of the GI diseases, such as Peptic Ulcer, GERD and Acute Gastroenteritis, are curable. A healthy lifestyle combined with effective treatment can prevent or alleviate complications and help maintain a good health condition for work.



Enquiries

- If you wish to enquire about this booklet or other Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) matters, please contact the Occupational Safety and Health Branch of the Labour Department:

Tel.: 2852 4041 or
2559 2297 (auto-recording service available outside
office hours)

Fax: 2581 2049

Email: enquiry@labour.gov.hk

- Information on the services offered by the Labour Department and on major labour legislation is also available on our website at www.labour.gov.hk.
- For details on the services offered by the Occupational Safety and Health Council, please call 2739 9000 or browse the website at www.oshc.org.hk.

Complaints

- If you have any complaint about unsafe operations or environments at workplaces, please call the Labour Department's OSH complaint hotline at 2542 2172 or fill in and submit an online OSH complaint form on our website. All complaints will be treated in the strictest confidence.



Online OSH complaint Form

This booklet is issued free of charge and can be obtained from offices of the Occupational Health Service of the Labour Department. It can also be downloaded from the Labour Department website at www.labour.gov.hk. For enquiries about addresses and telephone numbers of the offices, please visit the Labour Department website or call 2852 4041.

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