

Common gastrointestinal ailments are a pain, but treatable

There was a time when treating things like acid reflux and other gastrointestinal issues might have been a challenge. In fact, [Khalid Naseer, MD](#), a gastroenterologist at [OSF HealthCare in Alton, Illinois](#), has no trouble rattling off all the common ailments of the body's digestive tract that walk through his door. But he says many issues that were once cumbersome to tackle now have a wealth of knowledge. And for patients, that means easier treatment.

Acid reflux

[Gastroesophageal reflux disease](#), sometimes called acid reflux, indigestion, or heartburn, is when gastric acid from your stomach flows back up into your esophagus. This happens when a muscle at the bottom of your food pipe, the lower esophageal sphincter, relaxes too often or for too long.

Treatment, Dr. Naseer says, starts *before* you feel bad.

"We are having to see a lot of patients who are gaining weight. On top of it, we're drinking a lot of caffeine and carbonated beverages. We're eating a lot of fried foods, citrus, chocolates, tomatoes." Dr. Naseer says. "All these things relax the sphincter muscle of the esophagus, and that worsens the acid reflux."

Dr. Naseer says acid reflux patients at his office will be asked about those lifestyle choices, but an endoscopy may also be necessary. That's when a tube with a camera is sent down your throat, and a provider examines your digestive tract for things like inflammation, scarring and ulcers. From there, a provider may prescribe medication. Surgery is also an option in more severe cases.

Dr. Naseer adds that letting acid reflux go untreated can lead to other issues, like difficulty swallowing or breathing and even throat cancer.

Hepatitis C

When Dr. Naseer brings up the liver disease [Hepatitis C](#), he repeats the refrain: it's become a very treatable condition.

"We see the patient. We do some testing for them," Dr. Naseer says. "They usually don't need a liver biopsy anymore unless there is some significant issue such as advanced cirrhosis or if there is any confusion about the diagnosis."

Treatment involves taking medicine for eight to 12 weeks, and Dr. Naseer says he's seeing patients cured 95% of the time.

"There is a little bit of a better community understanding that hepatitis C has become a treatable disease," Dr. Naseer says. "But still, a lot of people just don't come in to get treated. And if they don't get it treated, it keeps causing damage to the liver, and eventually they develop cirrhosis of the liver, which is a precancerous condition."

Dr. Naseer says, currently, Hepatitis C is mostly spread through sharing a needle (to take illegal drugs,

for example) with someone who has the disease. He says getting the disease through blood contact or sexual relations has become rare.

Another thing Dr. Naseer says to put on your Hepatitis C prevention list: if you have risk factors for fatty liver, such as obesity, get your liver checked once a year. Or if you have a routine ultrasound and your provider notices liver problems, the provider should order more tests to investigate further.

Be proactive

More information on gastrointestinal issues and treatments can be found on the [OSF HealthCare website](#).