

The Impact of Lifestyle Choices on Gastrointestinal Health

Edward John*

Department of Gastroenterology, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Center, USA

Introduction

Gastroenterology is the branch of medicine focused on the digestive system and its disorders. This specialty encompasses a wide range of organs, including the esophagus, stomach, intestines, liver, pancreas, gallbladder, and bile ducts. Gastroenterologists diagnose, treat, and help prevent diseases that affect these organs, playing a crucial role in overall human health due to the vital functions of digestion, absorption, and elimination in the body. The Gastrointestinal (GI) system is essential for nutrient absorption, immunity, and waste removal. GI diseases are common worldwide, affecting people across all age groups and geographic locations. Conditions such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), Crohn's disease, and liver disease are prevalent, with millions of people seeking care from gastroenterologists each year. Furthermore, GI cancers, including colorectal and pancreatic cancers, are among the leading causes of cancer-related deaths globally, underscoring the need for early diagnosis, effective treatments, and preventive care. GERD occurs when stomach acid frequently flows back into the oesophagus, causing symptoms such as heartburn, chest pain, and a sour taste in the mouth. Chronic GERD can lead to complications like esophagitis and Barrett's oesophagus, which increase the risk of oesophageal cancer [1,2]. IBS is a functional GI disorder characterized by symptoms like abdominal pain, bloating, and altered bowel habits.

Description

It is often influenced by diet, stress, and hormonal changes. While not life threatening, IBS significantly impacts quality of life. IBD encompasses conditions such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, both of which cause inflammation of the GI tract. Crohn's disease can affect any part of the GI tract, whereas ulcerative colitis is limited to the colon. Symptoms include abdominal pain, diarrhoea, and weight loss, with severe cases requiring surgery. Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder triggered by the ingestion of gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley, and rye. Gluten intake damages the small intestine lining in affected individuals, leading to malabsorption of nutrients and symptoms such as diarrhoea, fatigue, and malnutrition. Liver diseases are diverse, ranging from viral infections like hepatitis B and C to chronic conditions like cirrhosis, often caused by alcohol consumption or Non Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD). The liver's essential functions in metabolism, detoxification, and blood clotting make its health critical. Pancreatitis refers to inflammation of the pancreas,

which can be acute or chronic [3,4]. Common causes include gallstones and excessive alcohol intake. Chronic pancreatitis can lead to digestive issues and diabetes due to the pancreas's role in producing digestive enzymes and insulin.

Conclusion

Endoscopy involves inserting a flexible tube with a camera through the mouth or rectum to examine the GI tract. It is used to diagnose conditions such as ulcers, polyps, and tumours. Specialized types include colonoscopy, gastroscopy, and sigmoidoscopy. These imaging modalities help visualize internal structures, enabling the detection of abnormalities like tumours, blockages, and organ inflammation. CT and MRI scans are particularly useful for detailed images of the liver, pancreas, and intestines. Capsule endoscopy involves swallowing a small, pill-sized camera that captures images of the small intestine, which is difficult to reach with traditional endoscopy. It is particularly useful for diagnosing small bowel diseases like Crohn's disease and obscure GI bleeding.

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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*Corresponding author: Edward John, Department of Gastroenterology, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Center, USA, E-mail: edward_j@gmail.com

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