

DYSPEPSIA

Dyspepsia is the medical term for indigestion and generally means pain or discomfort in the upper central area of the abdomen. It can be associated with a wide range of disorders including peptic ulcer, reflux disease, coeliac disease, functional dyspepsia (simple indigestion) and some kinds of stomach cancers.

There are two major categories of dyspepsia:

1. **Functional dyspepsia** – this is the commonest cause of dyspepsia
2. **Organic or non-functional dyspepsia** – due to visible (at endoscopy) disorders of the upper gastrointestinal tract e.g. peptic ulcer, reflux disease, gallstone disease, etc.

The vast majority cases are due to functional dyspepsia. This is a completely benign disorder though

Functional Dyspepsia:

This is a very common and benign condition characterised by upper abdominal discomfort, nausea, bloating, and fullness after food, etc which may be due to enhanced sensitivity of nerves in and around the stomach and disorganised muscle contractions in the stomach. The cause of this is not usually apparent though some cases may be associated with stress, anxiety, infections, medications, etc and there is an association with irritable bowel syndrome.

There are no particular tests for this disorder though it is important to rule out other more serious disorders which may simulate functional

dyspepsia. If there are alarm symptoms such as unexplained weight loss, anaemia, frequent persistent vomiting, difficulty swallowing food, etc

then more careful and detailed medical evaluation is advised as some times these symptoms are caused by cancer..

It can often be controlled with a variety of measures including a supportive environment, doctor, stress alleviating strategies, counselling, medications and dietary modification. Though this is a common relapsing disorder the majority of patients feel better once a diagnosis is made and many will respond to one or other of the treatments outlined.

Organic dyspepsia:

There are several causes of organic dyspepsia with the commonest being peptic ulcer disease and gastro-oesophageal reflux disease. These disorders can be diagnosed most commonly at gastroscopy and the treatment depends on the precise cause and is usually highly effective. Peptic ulcer disease is almost always caused by a common and treatable stomach infection called *Helicobacter pylori* and/or exposure to typical anti-inflammatory drugs (including aspirin). There are some serious disorders of dyspepsia though thankfully rare – these include stomach and other abdominal cancers.