

Let's Talk Guts

Your Empowerment Toolkit

LET'S
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Your digestive health matters and it's important to speak to your doctor about persistent digestive symptoms. Talking about your symptoms can sometimes feel difficult or embarrassing, but your doctor is there to listen and help. We all have guts and digestive symptoms are nothing to be ashamed of. Many digestive symptoms are common and most of us will experience them every now and then. But persistent, bothersome symptoms can be a sign of something more serious, so it's important to talk to your doctor and get them checked out. Use this guide to feel more comfortable, confident and prepared when it comes to speaking about your digestive health.

Red flag symptoms: When to seek help

Symptoms to get checked immediately:

- Vomiting blood.
- Black, tarry poo.

If you are experiencing any of these, it is important to seek medical advice **immediately** by calling **999**.



Symptoms to get checked as soon as possible:

- Blood in your poo or when you wipe your bottom.
- Unexplained weight loss.
- A **persistent change** in your bowel habits, like looser poo or needing to go more often, lasting three weeks or more.
- Ongoing vomiting.
- A **lump or pain** in your tummy that doesn't go away or starts suddenly.
- **Difficulty swallowing** or feeling like food is getting stuck.
- **Extreme fatigue** which is unexplained or chronic tiredness that doesn't improve with rest.



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Preparing for your appointment

Checklist

- ☐ **1. Track your symptoms:** For at least a few days before your appointment, note down what happens and if anything specific triggers your symptoms, such as eating certain foods. The more information you can give your doctor, the better equipped they are to help you.
- ☐ **2. Prioritise your questions and worries:** Write down the main thing you want to get out of your appointment. Is it a diagnosis, more information, more tests, or a referral to a specialist? It's important to know what you'd like the outcome to be as it can help guide the conversation.
- ☐ **3. Bring someone else:** If you're feeling nervous or worried about remembering what is said in your appointment, ask someone you trust to join you for support. Making notes can be a great way to remember what happened during your appointment too.



Starting the conversation...

Doctors talk about bowels and bodies every single day. We know that it can sometimes feel like you're the only one experiencing something, but try to remember that your doctor will have had countless conversations with other patients about their digestive health before, and you're not alone in how you're feeling. If you're not sure how to start the conversation, try using one of these phrases:

"I'm finding it a bit difficult to talk about this, but I've been experiencing some changes in my gut that are concerning me..."

"I'm worried about some digestive symptoms I've been having and I wanted to get them checked out."

"I've been keeping track of my digestive symptoms for a few weeks and I'd like to share them with you."

Want to know more about digestive symptoms and conditions?

Guts UK is the national charity for the digestive system. We provide information and support on more than 40 digestive conditions and symptoms, as well as health and lifestyle. Find more information at gutscharity.org.uk/information.

Need support? Contact our Helpline on 0300 102 4887 or gutscharity.org.uk/helpline.



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Your appointment notes

Use this space to write down your symptoms and questions before your appointment, and to note down what your doctor says during the conversation so you don't forget.

When I go to my appointment, I want to mention:

When I go to my appointment, I want to ask:

1.

2.

3.



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Your appointment notes

What the doctor said and next steps:

(For example: tests, lifestyle changes, prescribed medication or when to come back for another appointment)

Useful questions to ask your doctor if you get stuck:

- What do you think could be causing my digestive symptoms?
- Do I need any tests and what will these look for?
- What should I do if my symptoms change or get worse?
- Is there anywhere I can go to get more information about things you've mentioned?



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