Many people experience abdominal pain or bouts of diarrhea from time to time. It may be related to something you ate or a passing illness that you recover from quickly. But how can you tell when it may be a symptom of something more serious, such as an inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)?

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are the two most common types of IBD. These two conditions affect about 1 out of 200 people in the United States and strike men and women equally. They tend to run in families and are marked by an abnormal response by the body's immune system. “If you have IBD, your immune system may mistake food or bacteria in your gastrointestinal tract as possibly foreign substances, which can cause harm to your gastrointestinal system and cause the symptoms of IBD,” said Dr. Bincy P. Abraham, director of the Fondren Inflammatory Bowel Disease Program at Houston Methodist Underwood Center for Digestive Disorders.

**WATCH FOR THESE SYMPTOMS**

If you experience any of the following symptoms, and they don't respond to over-the-counter treatments or clear up within a short time, see your doctor.

- Abdominal cramps and pain
- Blood in your stool — either bright red blood in the toilet bowl or darker blood mixed with your stool
- Constipation
- Persistent diarrhea
- Sense of incomplete evacuation (emptying) following a bowel movement
- Urgent need to move bowels

Additional general symptoms of IBD can include

- Fatigue
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Loss of normal menstrual cycle
- Night sweats
- Unintentional weight loss

Symptoms of IBD may be mild or severe, and may come and go, sometimes clearing up for months or even years at a time.

**LEADING-EDGE DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT**

At Houston Methodist Lynda K. and David M. Underwood Center for Digestive Disorders, we offer comprehensive, leading-edge diagnostics and treatments for IBD as well as innovative research that expands the care of patients with IBD. Our experts use sophisticated, state-of-the-art imaging and technology to evaluate the gastrointestinal tract, accurately diagnose disorders and develop the best treatment options for each patient — from simple lifestyle changes to advanced surgeries. We provide a wide range of tests and services to treat the entire digestive tract, including conditions of the esophagus, stomach, intestines, colon, biliary tract, gall bladder, liver and pancreas. We have decades of experience treating and researching digestive disorders, which affect millions of people nationwide.