

Condition Snapshot

# Digestive disorders

For employers, the fallout from digestive disorders can be difficult to digest. From rising care costs to lost productivity, gut health issues are impacting employer budgets – inside and out.



 **Definition**

- A range of conditions that affect the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, which includes the esophagus, stomach, intestines, liver, pancreas and gallbladder

 **Trend**

- 86% of GLP-1 users have experienced GI side effects<sup>2</sup>
- 37% increase in costs driven from digestive disorders from 2019–2025<sup>3</sup>

 **Causes<sup>4</sup>**

- Alcohol consumption
- Genetic history
- Lack of physical activity
- Obesity
- Poor dietary habits
- Cigarette smoking

# 60–70M

Americans are affected by digestive diseases each year<sup>1</sup>

**“The digestive health of employees can have a meaningful impact on workforce productivity and quality of life. Offering clinical programs and resources that help manage chronic conditions can lead to more supported and healthier employees.”**

**Dr. Rhonda Randall**

Chief Medical Officer, UnitedHealthcare Employer & Individual

## Digesting the details

Individuals with frequent GI symptoms have decreased productivity at work and a lower quality of life. More serious digestive disorders were associated with an even more significant impact on both employees and employers.<sup>1</sup>

### Who

Most common in:<sup>3</sup>








**Females**



**Baby Boomers**  
(born between 1946–1964)

Colorectal cancer is the deadliest cancer for Americans under the age of 50, with the most cases in:<sup>5</sup>

-  **1 Kentucky**
-  **2 Louisiana**
-  **3 West Virginia**
-  **4 Alabama**
-  **5 Hawaii**

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### How



**Increased doctor appointments** due to complex diagnostic and treatment journeys, which generated 35.4M office visits annually<sup>1</sup>



**Mental health issues** as gut health has been linked to depression and anxiety<sup>6</sup>



**Financial strain** due to affiliated medical costs and increased presenteeism or absenteeism that could have hindered productivity

## How much

**\$34.31**

average per member,  
per month care costs<sup>3</sup>

**↑10.5%**

increase in year-over-year  
average cost per member,  
per month<sup>3</sup>

**\$142B**

in total health care  
expenditures generated  
by GI diseases each year<sup>7</sup>

## Strategies for employers

Employers that take a whole-person approach to their benefits may help employees address the multiple factors that stem from digestive disorders while helping control health care costs.



### Understand employee population: Claims data

can reveal the impact that digestive disorders may be having on a workforce and why, including common comorbid health conditions and social drivers of health (SDOH) challenges. This insight can help inform health benefits design and identify opportunities to tailor communication strategies.



### Provide behavioral health support:

Offer employees **access to behavioral health resources** designed to help them manage the impact that digestive disorders can have on mental health. Apps like **Calm Health** can give employees 24/7 support when flare-ups disrupt quality of life.



### Promote preventive screenings and preventive care:

Preventive screenings play a critical role in detecting digestive conditions early. Encourage annual checkups and adherence to preventive screenings like colonoscopies and at-home detection kits.



### Provide resources to help employees manage their condition:

Through **UHC Hub**<sup>®</sup>, employers can offer **Cylinder**<sup>®</sup> to help employees manage digestive disorders – without adding administrative complexity. Cylinder provides virtual, personalized support for digestive health issues.

Learn how UnitedHealthcare supports  
a whole-person health approach >



<sup>1</sup> Digestive Disease Statistics in US 2025 | Key Facts. The Global Statistics. Available: <https://www.theglobalstatistics.com/digestive-disease-statistics-in-us/>. Accessed: March 19, 2026.

<sup>2</sup> The GLP-1 Surge: What employers and health plans need to know. Cylinder. Available: <https://cylinderhealth.com/the-glpl-surge-what-employers-need-to-know/>. Accessed: March 26, 2026.

<sup>3</sup> UnitedHealthcare Employer & Individual self-funded and fully insured data based on claims incurred between Nov. 2024-Oct. 2025, paid through Jan. 2026.

<sup>4</sup> Malkani, N. et al. Systemic Diseases and Gastrointestinal Cancer Risk. National Library of Medicine, Aug. 13, 2023. Available: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10405983>. Accessed: March 19, 2026.

<sup>5</sup> Mapped: Colorectal cancer is now the deadliest cancer for young adults. Advisory Board, March 19, 2026. Available: <https://www.advisory.com/daily-briefing/2026/03/19/colorectal-cancer>.

<sup>6</sup> The Brain-Gut Connection. Johns Hopkins Medicine. Available: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/the-brain-gut-connection>. Accessed: March 24, 2026.

<sup>7</sup> Shepherd, M. The Effects of a Digital Digestive Care Management Program on Employee Absenteeism. PubMed Central, May 7, 2025. Available: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12579769/>.

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