

This Secret Top Cost Driver Is Hiding in Your Claims Data

Did you know nearly **1 in 4 Americans**¹ deal with debilitating digestive diseases every day? These diseases cause a variety of health problems that impact the workplace in sneaky ways and can quickly drive up healthcare costs. Employers may be accustomed to seeing digestive claims in their data, but they may not realize there are a staggering 850+ ICD² codes related to gastrointestinal claims alone.

Left untreated or unmanaged, GI issues can be unsuspecting revenue eaters, and are a top driver of claims costs.³

Digestive diseases often require frequent doctor visits, expensive medications and reduced productivity which may lead to hidden costs for employers due to absenteeism and presenteeism. These less obvious consequences of GI issues can impact revenue if employee digestive health is overlooked.

Presenteeism

When employees show up to work but are not fully engaged or productive due to illness, injury, or other health conditions.

Absenteeism

Habitual absences from work as a result of illness, personal reasons, or other factors outside of a person's control.

The Cost of Digestive Disease

\$136 billion⁴

The total annual cost of digestive diseases—greater than heart disease, trauma or mental health.

\$17,200 annually⁵

The average healthcare cost per individual with digestive disease

\$31 billion⁶

The annual cost of the 3 million⁷ hospital admissions due to digestive disease.

The Bottom Line

Helping employees manage their digestive health is not just good for your bottom line, it's also a great HR policy. Employers can support employees with digestive diseases by providing access to a digestive health solution in their benefits package, offering flexible accommodations and promoting general health and wellness in the workplace.

Six Common Digestive Diseases Driving Up Claims Costs

It's important for employers to be aware of the digestive diseases that can impact employees and drive up claims costs in the workplace. Having this knowledge can help them support employees and keep healthcare expenses from skyrocketing.

🌿 **Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)** (ICD-10 Code: K58)

A chronic digestive disease that causes abdomen pain, diarrhea, constipation, bloating and an urgent need to use the bathroom.

🌿 **Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)** (ICD-10 Code: K21)

A chronic digestive disease in which stomach acid flows back into the esophagus, resulting in heartburn, difficulty swallowing and chest pain. It affects approximately **20% of adults**.¹⁰

🌿 **Crohn's Disease** (ICD-10 Code: K50)

Affecting **3 million Americans**¹¹, this chronic inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) causes diarrhea, fever, abdominal pain, fatigue and night sweats.

🌿 **Ulcerative Colitis** (ICD-10 Code: K51)

A type of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) that causes ulcers in the lining of the colon and rectum. Symptoms may include diarrhea, abdominal cramping and rectal bleeding.

🌿 **Celiac Disease** (ICD-10 Code: K90)

This autoimmune disorder causes GI tract inflammation and symptoms like diarrhea, fatigue and vomiting in response to gluten consumption for **nearly 2 million Americans**.¹²

🌿 **Diverticulitis** (ICD-10 Code: K57)

Diverticulitis is a condition in which small pouches form in the lining of the colon and become inflamed or infected. Affecting **2.2 million people in the U.S.**,¹³ it can cause abdominal pain, fever, nausea and constipation.

One study found IBS, which affects **10-15%** of U.S. adults⁸, interferes with productivity and performance an average of nine days per month and results in missing work an average of two days per month.



Relationship Between Gut Health and Other Health Conditions

The gut is often called the **“second brain”**.¹⁴ This is because the enteric nervous system of the GI tract controls digestive processes independent of the central nervous system and connects to many other parts of the body. Research suggests that this gut-brain connection plays a significant role in a wide range of health conditions.

Common Conditions Linked to Gut Health

🍃 Mental Health

The gut-brain axis plays a key role in regulation of mood and behavior. Poor gut health can be linked with psychological disorders like depression and anxiety.¹⁵

🍃 Stress

Stress can lead to changes in the gut microbiome, including inflammation and impaired digestive function¹⁶, which can exacerbate symptoms of digestive disorders.

🍃 Cardiac Health and Heart Disease

Gut health can impact inflammation¹⁷, cholesterol levels¹⁸ and blood pressure—all factors which contribute to heart disease.

🍃 Immune Function

About 70-80% of immune cells are located in the gut¹⁹, so digestive health can have a significant impact on how the immune system functions and protects from illnesses.



How Stigma Impacts Digestive Health

Digestive disease can be highly stigmatized due to the nature of its symptoms.

The stigma associated with digestive disease can affect employees in several ways:

Discrimination

Employees may avoid disclosing their digestive health conditions for fear of being discriminated against in the workplace²⁰. This can make them feel unsupported and isolated.

Low Morale at Work

Shame or embarrassment tied to stigma make it harder for employees to deal with their symptoms in the workplace²¹, increasing issues like presenteeism, absenteeism and stress.

Failing to Seek Care

Stigma can prevent an employee from seeing a doctor and getting an accurate diagnosis for their digestive condition(s), which can lead to worse problems in the future.



7 Ways To Support Employees With Digestive Issues

From disruptive symptoms and workplace stigma to low employee morale and expensive healthcare costs, digestive diseases can wreak havoc in the workplace. The good news is that there are things employers can do to support employees and keep costs down.

1. Offer a Digestive Health Solution as Part of Your Benefits Package

GIThrive is Vivante Health's comprehensive digital gut solution that gives employees the tools they need to manage GI conditions, such as 24/7 access to health experts and systems to track healthy habits.

According to a survey, **93%** of GIThrive members who work with their Care Team for one month or more see improvements in their quality of life.²²

2. Promote Healthy Stress Management

Stress can exacerbate GI symptoms. Providing resources on stress management techniques such as yoga, meditation, [cognitive behavioral therapy \(CBT\)](#)²³ or breathing exercises can help employees learn how to keep stress in check.

3. Provide Educational Resources on GI Health

Offering resources on digestive diseases not only helps employees learn more about their conditions, it can also help fight stigma and create a more accommodating workplace. [See how education fits into our GIThrive program.](#)

4. Offer Flexible and Remote Work Arrangements

Giving employees flexible work options—like the ability to work from home on days when symptoms are severe—can help reduce absenteeism and presenteeism.

5. Encourage Regular Breaks for Physical Activity

Encouraging breaks for activities like stretching and walks can help employees maintain healthy digestion, reduce symptom flare-ups and manage stress.

6. Ensure Easy Access to Restrooms

Trying to hold in bowel movements because bathrooms are far away—or out of embarrassment for taking too many bathroom breaks—can make GI issues worse.

7. Offer Healthy Snack Options

Sharing nutritional resources can help employees make more informed food choices for their gut health. It can also be turned into a great team-building exercise; for example, our Vivante Health employees gathered all their favorite gut-friendly recipes and made it into an office cookbook.



How Employers Can Help

Gut health has direct links to employee wellbeing, happiness and productivity. As a top cost driver for employers, it should not be overlooked. Adding a comprehensive digestive health solution to your benefits packages can give employees access to critical resources and education that will help them manage their digestive diseases, improve their overall mental and physical health and reduce employer costs related to low productivity, absenteeism and health care.

Vivante Health's GIThrive digital digestive health solution provides complete care for everyone feeling the burden and stress from digestive health issues. Our comprehensive virtual GI care delivers the right care at the right time by pairing data-driven technology with a coordinated team of experienced physicians, registered dietitians and health coaches. Our clinically proven interventions, educational content and self-guided behavioral health modules provide personalized, on-demand care for members suffering from all GI related symptoms.

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Click here to learn more about how GIThrive can help employers support employee digestive health and save money in the long run.