

The Clinic

Ten Symptoms You Shouldn't Ignore

When do you know when a twitch or a pain should be cause for worry? Knowing when to pay attention to your body's signals can go a long way in preventing a health condition from getting worse and in helping you get appropriate treatment as soon as possible. According to the Mayo Clinic, the following are 10 symptoms you shouldn't ignore.

1. Unexplained Weight Loss. If you're losing weight but you know you're not on a diet, or doing anything specifically to shed the pounds, it's time to set an appointment with your doctor. Losing 5% of your body weight within a month, or 10% of your weight within six to 12 months is considered excessive weight loss. An overactive thyroid, depression, liver disease or cancer can cause you to lose weight rapidly.



2. A fever that won't go away. Fever usually means your body is fighting off an infection. A persistent (having it for more than a week) low grade (38 °C or 100.4 °F), fever could signal conditions ranging from a urinary tract infection, to tuberculosis, or to something more serious such as lymphoma.

3. Shortness of breath. Being short of breath after exercise, or because you have a stuffy nose, is considered normal. However, if you seem to be relaxed and you find yourself struggling for air, it could be a cause for concern. If you find yourself wheezing, making a high-pitched

sound like a whistle when you breathe, or the breathlessness worsens when you recline, it's time to see the doctor. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, chronic bronchitis, asthma, heart problems, anxiety, panic attacks, a blood clot in the lung (pulmonary embolism), pulmonary fibrosis and pulmonary hypertension are some of the culprits for this condition.

4. Unexplained changes in bowel movements. The key thing to look out for here is a *sudden change*. For example, if you are suffering from constipation, but have a long history of the condition, you don't have to rush to the emergency room just yet. However, if the condition comes with vomiting, nausea or abdominal pain, you should seek medical attention. Furthermore, diarrhea for more than a few days, blood in your stool or stool that is black or tarry-colored, are signs that you need to consult your doctor. Health problems such as infectious or bacterial gastroenteritis, food poisoning, Crohn's disease, colitis, irritable bowel syndrome and color cancer could be the root of your symptoms.

5. Changes in mental state. If you suddenly feel disoriented or confused, or if you suddenly experience hallucinations or aggressive behavior, you need to check with your physician. You could be a diabetic with low blood sugar. You could also be suffering from an infection, head injury, stroke, dementia or psychotic breakdown, or having an allergic reaction to a new medication.

6. New or severe headaches (especially in those over age 50). A painful headache that seems to come out of nowhere could mean you're having a stroke. Pay special attention if your headache is accompanied by fever, stiff neck, rash, mental confusions, seizures, vision changes, speaking difficulties, scalp tenderness or pain with chewing. You could have arteritis (blood vessel inflammation), meningitis, brain tumor, aneurysm, or bleeding in the brain after head trauma.

7. Short-term loss of vision, speech or movement control. Seek immediate medical help if you suffer any of the following:

- sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg on one side of your body

- sudden dimness, blurring or loss of vision
- loss of speech, or trouble talking or understanding speech
- a thunderclap headache (a severe headache that strikes like a clap of thunder)
- sudden dizziness, unsteadiness or a fall



These symptoms point to very serious conditions such as a transient ischemic attack or a stroke. Getting to the doctor as soon as possible could save your life. There is a three-hour window that will make you responsive to possible treatment with clot-dissolving medication.

8. Flashes of light. If you're suddenly seeing flashes of light that look like fireworks or lightning streaks, you need to get yourself to the emergency room. These symptoms point to eye conditions that could lead to vision loss or blindness. You should also check with an ophthalmologist if you observe an increase in floaters (dark specks that seem to move across your field of vision), a sudden "curtain" over your eye, or a sense that you're seeing the world through a red filter.

9. Feeling full after eating very little. If you haven't eaten very much, but feel full, consult with your doctor. You should also be concerned if you have nausea or vomiting that lasts more than a week. Possible conditions that could explain these symptoms are gastro-intestinal disorders, pancreatic cancer, stomach cancer and ovarian cancer.

10. Hot, red or swollen joints. Some swelling and discomfort in the joints is expected as we age. However, you should get checked out if the symptoms come in a triple combo – the joint is hot, red and swollen. You could be suffering from a bacterial infection and immediate medical care is necessary to save the joint function and to prevent the infection from spreading to other parts of your body. Other causes include gout and rheumatoid arthritis.