

# Crohn's & Colitis

## **\*What are Crohn's & Colitis?**

Learning that you or your loved one has been diagnosed with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis may fill you with anxiety, concern, and lots of questions. Even many health care professionals are unfamiliar with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. It's important to begin learning all that you can about what Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis is so that you can better understand these conditions and learn how to manage its symptoms.

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are both major categories of Inflammatory Bowel Diseases (IBD). IBD affects an estimated 1.4 million Americans. These chronic diseases tend to run in families and they affect males and females equally. While IBD can affect anyone, Caucasians are more likely than other ethnic groups to have IBD. The diseases are especially prevalent in Jews of European descent (Ashkenazi Jews). African Americans and Hispanics in the United States are increasingly affected.

Crohn's disease is a chronic inflammatory condition of the gastrointestinal tract and may affect any part from the mouth to the anus. Read more about the signs and symptoms of Crohn's disease.

Ulcerative colitis is a chronic inflammatory condition limited to the colon, otherwise known as the large intestine. Read more about the signs and symptoms of ulcerative colitis.

## **Shared Symptoms of Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis**

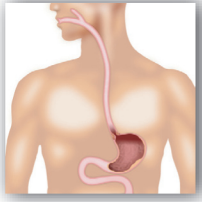
It is often difficult to diagnose which form of IBD a patient is suffering from because both Crohn's Disease and ulcerative colitis cause similar symptoms.

Symptoms related to inflammation of the GI tract:

- Diarrhea
- Rectal bleeding
- Urgent need to move bowels
- Abdominal cramps and pain
- Sensation of incomplete evacuation
- Constipation (can lead to bowel obstruction)

General symptoms that may also be associated with IBD:

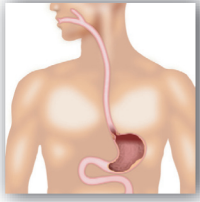
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Weight Loss
- Fatigue
- Night sweats
- Loss of normal menstrual cycle



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Both illnesses do have one strong feature in common. They are marked by an abnormal response by the body's immune system. The immune system is composed of various cells and proteins. Normally, these protect the body from infection. In people with Crohn's disease, however, the immune system reacts inappropriately.

However, in people suffering from IBD, the immune system reacts inappropriately, mistaking benign or beneficial cells and bacteria for harmful foreign substances. When this happens, your immune system can do harm to your gastrointestinal tract and produce the symptoms of IBD.



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## **More: Crohn's Disease & Colitis**

Crohn's disease and colitis are often grouped together because they are the two main diseases in a larger category known as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). It is estimated that as many as 1.4 million Americans have IBD.

IBD is an equal opportunity condition. Research shows that men and women are just as likely to have either Crohn's or colitis. It does tend to run in families. And, the one thing that everyone with these diseases has in common is chronic inflammation of the digestive or gastrointestinal tract, is usually characterized by abdominal pain and diarrhea.

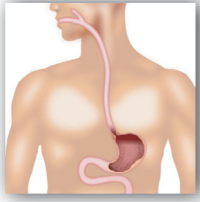
The symptoms of these two illnesses are so similar, in fact, that doctors often are challenged to make a definitive diagnosis. In fact, approximately 10 percent of colitis cases are unable to be pinpointed as either ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease and are called "indeterminate colitis"

**Crohn's disease** is named after Dr. Burrill B. Crohn who, in 1932, co-published a landmark paper describing the features of the chronic disorder.

- Crohn's disease usually affects the intestines, but may occur anywhere from the mouth to the end of the rectum (anus).
- **Age Matters:** Crohn's disease may occur in people of all ages, but it is primarily a disease of adolescents and young adults, affecting mainly those between 15 and 35. Crohn's disease can also occur in people who are 70 or older and in young children as well. In fact, 10 percent of those affected -- or an estimated 140,000 -- are youngsters under the age of 18.
- **Symptoms** of Crohn's disease include: crampy abdominal pain, fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, pain with passing stool, persistent and watery diarrhea and weight loss.
- **Diagnosis:** There is no single test that can establish the diagnosis of Crohn's disease. Physicians at the Crohn's & Colitis Treatment Center are able to use the most advanced equipment and technology to determine the diagnosis, by evaluating myriad test results along with a combination of information from the patient's history and physical exam.

**Ulcerative Colitis**, is characterized by inflammation only in the colon and or the rectum.

- Although stress and certain foods can trigger symptoms, they do not cause ulcerative colitis.
- **Age Matters:** The disease may occur at any age, but it usually occurs in people between ages 15 and 35. Ulcerative colitis may affect any age group, although there are peaks between the ages of 15 and 30 and again between the ages 50 and 70.
- Symptoms of colitis include: abdominal pain that usually disappears after a bowel movement, abdominal sounds, blood and pus in the stools, diarrhea (in varying amounts throughout the day), fever, rectal pain and weight loss.
- **Diagnosis:** Colonoscopy with biopsy is generally used to diagnose ulcerative colitis.



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## We're Here to Help...

Patients with Crohn's disease or colitis will find great comfort from the caring, experienced team of doctors and nurses at Atlanta Center for Gastroenterology. Our medical team, with more than 36 years of experience, is committed to the most advanced care available to treat Crohn's & Colitis and other gastroenterological conditions.

## Living with Crohn's disease and Colitis:

Living with the symptoms of an inflammatory bowel disease such as Crohn's or colitis can be upsetting. It's understandable if you have feelings of embarrassment or sadness. After all, chronic abdominal pain and diarrhea that force you to isolate from activities you love can affect your daily life in many ways.

However, definitive diagnosis and an appropriate treatment plan designed especially for you are the first steps to improving your quality of life. That's the great news! The cautionary news is that conditions such as Crohn's disease or colitis can flare up without much notice. While there is no definitive evidence that any particular foods make the symptoms worse, doctors believe there are some food-related lifestyle changes people with Crohn's or colitis can make to reduce the incidence of symptomatic flare ups.

Additionally, take note of situations that make you feel anxious or stressed and avoid those activities whenever possible. Doctors believe stress can make symptoms of Crohn's and colitis worse. Here are some lifestyle considerations to think about when managing Crohn's or colitis:

- **Stay hydrated.** Try to drink plenty of fluids daily, especially water. However, alcohol and caffeinated beverages can make diarrhea worse and carbonated drinks produce gas. Avoid those as much as possible.
- **Consider limiting dairy.** People who experience lactose intolerance should avoid or limit dairy products that induce diarrhea, abdominal pain and gas.
- **Monitor fiber intake.** People with inflammatory bowel disease may find that fiber increases gas, pain and diarrhea.
- **Less is more.** Sometimes eating several smaller meals a day, rather than the usual larger meals at breakfast, lunch and dinner may ease digestion and make you feel better.
- **Eat smart!** This may sound obvious, but it's worth mentioning. You may love certain foods but they don't like you! Avoid gassy foods, acidic drinks, alcohol, carbonated beverages and anything else that exacerbates your symptoms of Crohn's or colitis.

## **Another Word (or Two) About Lifestyle Issues**

In addition to being careful about what you eat and drink, people living with Crohn's disease or Colitis should be mindful that managing the stressors of daily living - managing home, family life and work - are an important part of keeping your symptoms at bay.

While stress doesn't cause Crohn's or colitis, stressful living can make your condition feel worse and even trigger flare-ups.

Breathe... Consider engaging in calming activities such as yoga, exercise or other endeavors you love. Don't allow your Crohn's or colitis to isolate you from the things and people you enjoy.