



The Surgical Institute
at True North

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Crohn's Disease

What is Crohn's Disease?

Crohn's Disease is an autoimmune disease, but the precise cause is not known. Having family members with Crohn's disease likely increases the risk of developing the condition. When a person with this inherited risk is exposed to a trigger (such as illness or something in the environment), the immune system is activated.

In people with Crohn's Disease, the immune system recognizes the lining of the digestive tract as foreign and attacks it, causing inflammation. The inflammation causes the lining of the digestive tract to develop ulcers and bleed. Crohn's disease usually affects the colon and ileum (the end of the small intestine), but it can affect the entire digestive tract from the mouth of the anus.

The most common symptoms of Crohn's disease include abdominal pain, diarrhea, fatigue, and weight loss. Other symptoms can include sores, skin problems, eye inflammation, and anal problems such as fistulas and abscesses.

Crohn's Prognosis

There is no cure for Crohn's disease, but there are medications that if taken daily can help keep it under control. Patients with Crohn's disease may experience a pattern of remission (no symptoms) and flares (when the symptoms of Crohn's disease are present). About 10 to 20 percent of people will have a remission after their first flare of Crohn's disease. The pattern can be variable, with repeated bouts (weeks to months) of symptoms, such as mild diarrhea and cramping. Less commonly, there can be severe and disabling symptoms (such as severe abdominal pain and a blockage in the bowels). Lifelong treatment is needed for people with Crohn's disease, and treatment increases the chance of entering and staying in remission.



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Crohn's Disease Medication

There are many different medicines that help reduce the symptoms of Crohn's disease. Almost all the medicines work by reducing inflammation and the body's immune response. Some medicines treat symptoms when they are at their worst. Other medicines help keep symptoms from starting up or coming back. You might have to try a few different medicines before you find the one that works best for you.

Surgery for Crohn's Disease

Medicines can help control the symptoms and complications of Crohn's disease and can help you avoid or postpone surgery. However, surgery may be recommended if your symptoms are not controlled with the medicine or if the side effects of medicine are unbearable. This includes removing the area of the colon that has been most affected by the disease. About 80 percent of people with Crohn's disease will need surgery at some point in their life.

Crohn's Disease and Lifestyle

Lifestyle recommendations include regular exercise, avoiding non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) and Naprosyn (Aleve), and quitting smoking. Smoking can worsen the disease and increase the risk for surgery.

Crohn's Disease and Colon Cancer

Having Crohn's disease increases your risk of developing colorectal cancer. Your risk depends on how long you have had Crohn's disease and how much your colon is affected. Patients with Crohn's disease should start having colon cancer screenings yearly and often.