

Health Awareness



Understanding Crohn's Disease And Ulcerative Colitis

(NAPS)—If you or someone you care about is among the 1.6 million Americans with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis, there are a few facts you may find it helpful to know.

The conditions are collectively known as inflammatory bowel diseases, or IBD. They affect the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, the area of the body where digestion takes place. The diseases cause inflammation of the intestine and can lead to ongoing symptoms and complications. Although there is no known cause or cure for IBD, there are many effective treatments to help control it.

Anyone can be diagnosed with IBD, but adolescents and young adults between the ages of 15 and 35 are the most susceptible. Ten percent of those afflicted develop symptoms before age 18.

Approximately 20 percent of patients have another family member with IBD, and families frequently share a similar pattern of disease.

IBD can vary from one person to the next, but often has a significant effect on quality of life. People often experience ongoing symptoms, reduced ability to work, social stigma and difficulty with physical activities.

Symptoms And Complications

Ulcerative colitis involves the inner lining of the colon, while Crohn's disease involves all layers of the intestine and can occur in both the small intestine and colon. Here are four things to consider:

1. Symptoms range from mild to severe and can include any or all of the following:

- persistent diarrhea
- abdominal pain or cramps
- rectal bleeding
- fever and weight loss
- fatigue
- joint, skin or eye irritations
- delayed growth in children.

2. Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are unpredictable. Some people have no active symptoms for some time (also known as remission). Others require frequent hospitalizations and surgery. Symptoms may vary in nature, frequency and intensity.

3. Taking medications as prescribed by a doctor can help control symptoms, inflammation and any complications that may arise, such as malnutrition or anemia.

4. Regular colonoscopies are recommended in IBD patients to monitor inflammation and any growths that can potentially be removed, or changes happening within the colon.



If you develop persistent digestive difficulties, see your doctor. If you're diagnosed with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis, there are treatments that can help.

Treatments

There are medications currently available to help control disease symptoms and inflammation. The most commonly prescribed are aminosalicylates (5-ASA), corticosteroids, immunomodulators, biologic therapies, and antibiotics.

Surgery is sometimes recommended when medications can no longer control symptoms, when there are intestinal obstructions or when other complications arise.

Emotional Factors

IBD does not only affect the body physically. There can also be effects on mental health. Feelings of anxiety and depression can be very common in IBD, as patients learn to cope with everyday living. It is important not to ignore these invisible symptoms and to seek support or to talk to your doctor about any emotional concerns.

Diet

There may be times when modifying a patient's diet can be helpful, particularly when symptoms are active, but there's no evidence that certain foods cause IBD. No single diet or eating plan works for everyone with IBD. Diets are tailored to each patient.

What's Being Done

There is critical research in areas of genetics, microbiome and environmental triggers that will help improve quality of life for patients, advance toward precision medicine and, ultimately, lead to new treatment and cures.

Learn More

You can get information, guidance, support, and the latest clinical and research news from the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation at www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org. You can also join a nearby chapter, connect with others living with these diseases, and get involved. Call the IBD Help Center at 888-MY-GUT-PAIN (888-694-8872) or e-mail info@crohnscolitisfoundation.org.