

## CROHN'S DISEASE

### What is Crohn's Disease?

Crohn's disease is an inflammatory bowel disease that causes inflammation of the digestive tract. Crohn's disease can affect any part of the digestive tract from the mouth to the anus but it most commonly affects the lower part of the small intestine. The inflammation extends deep into the lining of the intestine. The inflammation can cause pain and can make the intestines empty frequently, resulting in diarrhoea.

### What causes it?

It is not known what causes Crohn's disease but a popular theory is that the body's immune system reacts abnormally in people with Crohn's disease, mistaking bacteria, foods and other substances as being foreign.

The immune system's response is to attack these so called "foreign" substances. During this process, the white blood cells of the body accumulate in the lining of the intestine and produce chronic inflammation which leads to ulceration and bowel injury.

### What are the symptoms?

The most common symptom of Crohn's disease is abdominal pain and diarrhoea. Other symptoms may occur such as:

- Rectal bleeding
- Weight loss
- Arthritis
- Skin problems
- Fever
- Anaemia due to persistent bleeding
- Children with Crohn's disease may suffer from delayed development and stunted growth

### How is it diagnosed?

- The doctor will diagnose Crohn's disease through a physical examination and based on symptoms of the disease
- Full blood count: white blood cell count to check for inflammation, persistent bleeding may result in anaemia
- Stool sample: to tell if there is bleeding or infection in the intestines
- X-ray
- Colonoscopy: through a visual examination of the colon the doctor will be able to examine the lining of the lower part of the intestine. He will be able to see if there is any bleeding or inflammation

### How can Diabetes Insipidus affect my health?

The most common complication of Crohn's disease is blockage of the intestine. Blockage occurs because the disease tends to thicken the intestinal wall with swelling and scar tissue.

Crohn's disease may also cause ulceration or sores that tunnel through to the surrounding tissues such as the bladder or skin. The area around the anus and rectum are often involved. The tunnels are also called fistulas. These fistulas may become infected.

Sometimes small tears called fissures may develop in the lining of the mucus membrane of the anus.

Nutritional complications are also common such as deficiencies in proteins, calories and vitamin as a result of poor absorption of food.

### Treatment

The goals of treatment of Crohn's disease are to control the inflammation, correct nutritional deficiencies and relieve symptoms such as abdominal pain, diarrhoea and rectal bleeding.

Treatment for Crohn's disease depends on the severity of the disease and its complications. Some people may have long periods of remission when they are free of disease. The disease may recur at various times and these recurrences or flare ups need to be managed.

#### Drug therapy:

- Anti-inflammatory drugs: Sulphasalazine is the most commonly used product. Other medicines such as Asacol may be used
- Corticosteroids: are very effective help to reduce inflammation
- Immuno-suppressants: these medicines help to suppress the immune system that contributes to inflammation e.g. Azathioprine

- Antibiotics: antibiotics are used to treat bacterial overgrowth in the small intestine caused by strictures, fistulas or previous surgery. Penicillins, sulphonamides, cephalosporins, tetracyclines, or metronidazole are commonly used
- Anti-diarrhoeals and fluid replacement: diarrhoea and crampy abdominal pain are often relieved by loperamide and codeine. Replacement fluids and electrolytes may need to be provided as well
- Other specialised medicines called biologicals such as Infliximab and Adalimumab in patients with more severe Crohns disease

## Your role in managing this condition

Crohn's disease may flare up for no apparent reason. Some possible triggers for recurrence of symptoms have been identified.

These include:

- Stress: Learn to use and implement stress management techniques
- Lapses in taking medication/incorrect dosing of medication: make sure you take your medication regularly and as prescribed by your doctor
- Recent use of certain medicines i.e. non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) or antibiotics. Some medicines such as Aspirin and Naproxen, Diclofenac etc may cause your condition to flare up as they may cause inflammation of the stomach lining. Antibiotics may alter the normal bacteria balance in your intestine and that may lead to diarrhoea or excessive growth of specific bacteria that can cause inflammation
- Eating certain foods: Diet can simply impact on your symptoms. You need to pay close attention to which foods aggravate your condition and avoid those foodstuffs in the future. Maintain a well balanced diet to prevent nutritional deficiencies. Limit your consumption of alcohol
- Smoking: smoking can also trigger flare-ups
- Communication: visit your doctor regularly in order to monitor your general health and well-being. Discuss any concerns regarding your condition and effects of treatment with your doctor
- Understand your condition and know how to manage the flare ups

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## Disclaimer

The reader should always consult a doctor if they believe they may be suffering from this medical condition. The information contained herein is intended to assist understanding and should not take the place of your doctor's advice or instructions. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained herein, Universal Care does not accept responsibility for any errors or omissions or their consequences, and shall not be liable for any damages suffered arising out of the use of this information.

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