

Care Gram

Crohn's Disease

What Is Crohn's Disease?

Crohn's Disease is a chronic inflammatory disease of the intestinal tract. The intestinal tract has four major parts: the esophagus (swallowing tube), the stomach, the small bowel (small intestine), and the colon (large intestine). The two main sites for Crohn's Disease are the ileum, which is the last part of the small bowel, and the colon. This disease begins with small areas of swelling and redness. The lining of the bowel then starts to form sores or ulcers. The bowel wall thickens and becomes narrow.

What Is the Cause of Crohn's Disease?

The cause of Crohn's Disease is unknown, although many believe that a slow-growing microorganism is the cause. The body's immune system, which protects it against many infections, also is known to be a factor.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms?

Some of the most common signs and symptoms of Crohn's Disease are:

- Pain in the stomach area
- Diarrhea
- Blood in stool
- Fever
- Weight loss
- Fatigue

How Is Crohn's Diagnosed?

- Medical history and physical examination
- Blood and stool tests
- X-rays of the small intestine and colon
- Sigmoidoscopy – a visual exam of the rectum and lower bowel
- Colonoscopy – a visual exam of the entire colon

Both colonoscopy and sigmoidoscopy require the use of a lighted, flexible tube called an endoscope and are performed by a doctor specially trained in this procedure.

What Are the Complications?

The disorder often is easily controlled for long periods of time; however, some problems outside the bowel may occur, including arthritis, eye and skin problems, and chronic liver problems in rare instances. When swelling continues in the ileum or colon, narrowing and/or partial blocking may occur. Surgery is



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required to treat these problems. When Crohn's Disease has been present for many years, there is an increased risk of cancer.

How Is Crohn's Disease Treated?

Some steps that you can take to improve your condition include:

- Maintain good nutrition
- Adequate exercise
- Maintain a positive attitude

Medical treatment is often necessary. There are four types of medications typically used in treating Crohn's Disease:

- Cortisone or steroids
- Anti-inflammation drugs
- Immune system suppressors
- Antibiotics

In severe cases, removing all or part of the bowel may be an option.