

Care Gram

Crohn's Disease

What Is Crohn's Disease?

Crohn's disease is a chronic inflammatory disease of the gastrointestinal tract. The gastrointestinal 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 sometimes becomes narrow.

What Is the Cause of Crohn's Disease?

The cause of Crohn's disease is unknown, although many factors may play a role. Crohn's disease may be inherited or linked to issues within the environment. Autoimmune disease may also be involved in the development of Crohn's disease. This is when the body's immune system, which fights infection, attacks and destroys cells in the digestive tract the same way it would a virus.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms?

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

- Pain in the abdomen
- Diarrhea
- Blood in stool
- Fever
- Weight loss
- Fatigue

How Is Crohn's Disease 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.



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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 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?

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

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

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

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