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ABOUT IBD

Learning as much as possible about your disease and educating your family and friends will help you manage your health. The more you are aware of what to expect, the more prepared you can be to meet any challenges along the way.

Approximately 1.4 million Americans are living with IBD.

How Did I Get This?

We are not exactly certain what causes Crohn's disease (CD) and ulcerative colitis (UC), or how to predict or prevent these diseases. Scientists suspect that a combination of four factors leads to IBD: a genetic component, an environmental trigger, the balance of intestinal bacteria, and an inappropriate reaction from the immune system.

It is not yet completely understood how or why certain genes or changes in genes seem to be associated with CD or UC, but it is a major focus of current research. The disease likely starts when the body is exposed to an environmental trigger (possibly an infection). Your immune system usually plays a protective role in fighting infections, but in IBD, it reacts inappropriately to your intestinal bacteria. This leads to continued *inflammation*—an immune response to tissue injury that causes redness, swelling, and pain.

You may hear that IBD is related to stress or diet. It is important to note that while stress may play a role in the symptoms, it does not cause the disease. Similarly, while maintaining a proper diet and ensuring good nutrition are important to managing IBD, your disease was not caused by something you ate.

Approximately 1.4 million Americans are living with IBD, split evenly between CD and UC. Men and women are equally affected. Although IBD can occur at any age, most people are diagnosed in their teens or early twenties, and 5% of patients are children. Studies have shown that 5%-20% of people with IBD come from families where more than one person has the disease. IBD tends to be more common in developed countries, particularly the United States, Canada, and in Europe, but it is increasing worldwide.

What Are Common Symptoms?

The symptoms of IBD vary from person to person, and may change over time.

The most common symptoms for both CD and UC are:

- Frequent and/or urgent bowel movements
- Diarrhea
- Bloody stool
- Abdominal pain and cramping

Although diarrhea is the most common symptom of IBD, other people may experience constipation. People with IBD may also report symptoms such as fatigue, lack of appetite, and weight loss. It is important to keep track of your symptoms and share them with your healthcare provider to determine the appropriate treatment.

What Is A Flare?

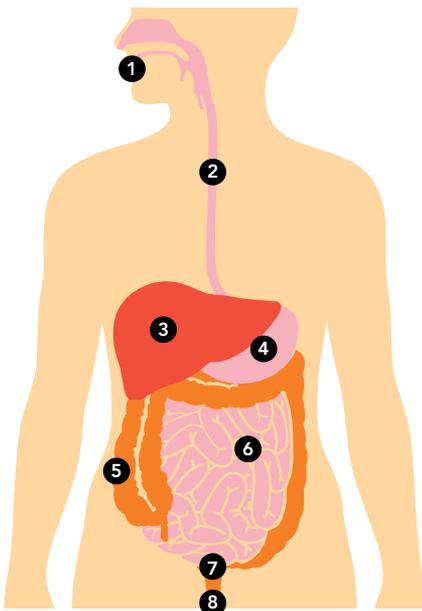
A *flare* is a set of IBD symptoms that occurs after a period of relief (*remission*). After being diagnosed, people who improve with treatment should watch for warning signs of a flare. Although symptoms do not always mean that inflammation is present, they often suggest that inflammation has returned or is becoming more severe. You will need to follow up with your healthcare provider to determine what is causing the symptoms and if treatment needs to be adjusted or changed. Newly diagnosed patients often ask how to tell the difference between a severe flare and an emergency. **If you experience any of the following, you should be evaluated by a doctor immediately:**

- Fever (above 100.5 degrees Fahrenheit)
- Severe difficulty eating or drinking, causing symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, or pain
- Abdominal pain that you cannot tolerate or is constant
- Large amounts of diarrhea leading to dehydration, causing symptoms such as dry mouth, extreme thirst, dizziness, or decreased urine production
- Heavy rectal bleeding

These are only a few of the possible emergency conditions. Other severe situations may also require immediate attention.

How Do I Know How Severe My Disease Is?

The severity of your disease depends on several factors, including where the disease is in your body, how much of your digestive tract is affected, the amount of inflammation, and any complications that arise.



THE GASTROINTESTINAL (GI) TRACT

- 1 Oral Cavity
- 2 Esophagus
- 3 Liver
- 4 Stomach
- 5 Large Intestine/Colon
- 6 Small Intestine
- 7 Rectum
- 8 Anus

Is There A Cure?

While research has led to the development of many effective treatment options, there are currently no cures for IBD. For some people with UC, there are surgical options involving the removal of the large intestine. This essentially cures the disease for those patients. However, inflammation in people with CD often returns after surgery, so CD is not considered curable.

What Is My Life Going To Be Like?

Although CD and UC are considered chronic diseases, many people find that with proper treatment and lifestyle changes, they can live normal lives like they did before experiencing symptoms. Death resulting from CD or UC is extremely rare, and most people with IBD can expect to live long, fulfilling lives. Some people have more difficult challenges than others, however, and that depends on their disease and how responsive they are to treatment. Many people actually find that their lives improve, because with diagnosis and treatment they are finally able to address the problems they were experiencing.

Your healthcare provider will likely recommend regular testing and checkups to monitor your disease. Treatment varies and may include a combination of medication, surgery, diet modifications, and lifestyle changes to minimize symptoms and help you feel well.

In addition to the ongoing need for tests and treatment, you may face some challenges with everyday living and social issues. For example, patients who experience frequent bowel movements may need to plan ahead to make sure there will be restrooms nearby. Learning to accommodate that, along with other difficulties of living with chronic disease, will require some adjustments to your lifestyle. You may need to make special arrangements at work or school. You may have to change some of your routines.

There will be times of difficulty and times of relief, but with appropriate medical care and healthy coping skills, you can make the most of your situation. Living with a chronic disease is a path in life, not an event. Your job now is to learn about the disease and to develop a way of life that works for you.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

IBD are chronic diseases that involve a genetic component, an environmental trigger, the balance of intestinal bacteria, and an inappropriate reaction from the immune system.

With proper treatment and lifestyle changes, you can live a long, fulfilling life.