

Fact Sheet

News from the IBD Help Center

Finding and communicating with an IBD specialist

If you've just been diagnosed with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis, you may have a lot of questions. Learning all that you can about your condition and understanding your treatment options will help you make informed decisions about your care. The first step you should take is to find a qualified gastroenterologist who is a specialist in treating people with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis, the two main types of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

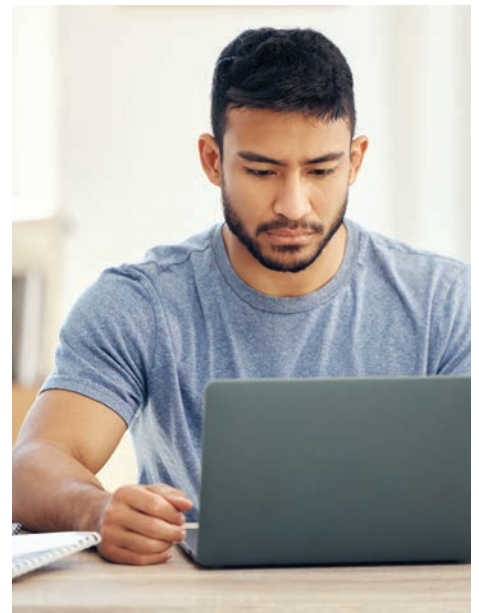
Begin your search

As you begin your provider search, start with your primary care physician (PCP). They will be able to refer you to a gastroenterologist, often called a GI for short. A gastroenterologist specializes in the treatment of people with disorders of the stomach or intestines. For patients under 18, they'll likely be referred to a pediatric gastroenterologist, a specialist in digestive diseases affecting children and adolescents.

Your next step is to check with your insurance company to understand your in- and out-of-network coverage options and to search for GIs who are covered within your network. Once you've gathered their names and contact information, you can ask your PCP about them or look them up online for detailed information regarding their education, qualifications, and sub-specialties. You'll want to find out whether they are experienced in treating people with IBD.

As you search for an IBD specialist, keep the following questions in mind:

- How long have they been in practice?
- Are they affiliated with a particular hospital or medical institution?
- Do they accept your insurance? Are there any co-pays or fees you need to be aware of?
- How does the office process insurance claims?
- How many IBD patients do they see over the course of a year?



To search for a medical expert visit: www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/find-a-medical-expert

Once you've narrowed down your search to two or three providers, consider making a consultation and ask the following questions to help you determine the best fit:

- Where is their practice located?
- What are their office hours?
- How long is the wait for an appointment?
- Do they have same day availability in an emergency?
- Is there an Advanced Practice Nurse, Physician Assistant (PA), or fellow you can see if the physician is unavailable?
- Where are routine tests and procedures performed? Are these done in the office, or at a partner facility?
- Do you feel comfortable with the provider and their staff?
- Are they easy to communicate with?

If you require surgery, your gastroenterologist will refer you to a colorectal surgeon, a surgeon who specializes in surgical procedures involving the rectum or colon (large intestine).

Communicating with your IBD specialist

Well before your appointment take the time to write down your questions and concerns. It's important to arrive at your appointment prepared to communicate about your needs.

It can be helpful to bring a family member or close friend to take notes when the physician is discussing your care. A loved one can offer moral support and bolster your efforts to convey your symptoms, your response to treatment, and any other observations, fears, or concerns.

Here are some questions you may want to ask:

- What, exactly, are my treatment and/or surgery options? What are the risks and benefits of each?
- Is there one treatment you'd recommend over the others?
- How long will the treatment take to work?
- What about side effects? Will they be short-term or long-term?
- How should I approach my diet? Is there a dietitian you can refer me to?
- Are there opportunities to participate in clinical trials? Do you consider a clinical trial an appropriate option for me?
- Is there a mental health clinician or social worker that you work with that you can refer me to?



It is important to feel comfortable asking questions and expressing your needs and concerns. If at any time you are not satisfied with the quality of communication with your healthcare team, share your concerns with them. You always have the option of getting another opinion to help in your decision-making process.

By asking the right questions and doing your research, you can find an IBD specialist that best fits your needs. However, you don't need to do this alone. The Crohn's & Colitis Foundation is here for you, offering support, guidance, and the latest clinical and scientific information in the field. Take the time to learn about us at www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org. Join your local chapter, connect with others living with these diseases, and get involved. Most of all, know that we're here for you whenever you need us. You can reach us at our IBD Help Center at 888.MY.GUT.PAIN (888.694.8872).

Helpful websites and organizations

Crohn's & Colitis Foundation—Find a Medical Expert
www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/find-a-medical-expert

.....
The American College of Gastroenterology
www.acg.gi.org

.....
The North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology
www.naspghan.org

.....
The American Society of Colon & Rectal Surgeons
www.fascrs.org

.....
The American Gastroenterological Association
www.gastro.org

abbvie

This fact sheet is supported in part by Abbvie.

Additional support is provided through the Foundation's annual giving programs and donors.

Disclaimer: The Crohn's & Colitis Foundation provides information for educational purposes only. We encourage you to review this educational material with your health care professional. The Foundation does not provide medical or other health care opinions or services. The inclusion of another organization's resources or referral to another organization does not represent an endorsement of a particular individual, group, company or product.