

Understanding Crohn's Disease:

What is Crohn's Disease?

Crohn's disease is an inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), the general name for diseases that cause inflammation in the intestines. Crohn's disease can be difficult to diagnose because its symptoms are similar to other intestinal disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome and ulcerative colitis. It may also be called granulomatous enteritis or colitis, regional enteritis, ileitis, or terminal ileitis.

Crohn's disease usually occurs in the lower part of the small intestine, called the ileum, but it can affect any part of the digestive tract, from the mouth to the anus. The inflammation extends into the lining of the affected organ.

What causes Crohn's disease?

The cause of Crohn's disease is unknown. Some scientists suspect that infection by certain bacteria may be the cause of Crohn's disease. However, there is conflicting evidence that the disease is caused by infection. Crohn's disease is not contagious. Although diet may affect the symptoms in patients with Crohn's disease, it is unlikely to be the cause.

Recently a gene has been identified as being associated with Crohn's disease. This gene is important in determining how the body responds to some bacterial products. Individuals with mutations in this gene are more susceptible to developing Crohn's disease.

Some researchers say that bacteria and fungus spread their toxicity in the intestines when the natural balance has been disrupted. This can arise in some of the following ways, please remember though that many of us will experience the same conditions but only some of us will then succumb to a particular disease:-

- Inadequate breast-feeding
- Over-reliance on antacids
- Use of antibiotics
- A diet high in sugar or starch
- Parasites or harmful bacteria or yeast from food or water
- Immunosuppressant from disease, malnutrition or stress
- Toxic chemicals in food or water
- Natural aging of the GI tract
- Use of aspirin and aspirin-like pain-killer (NSAIDs) that inflame the intestinal lining.

In a "vicious cycle," harmful bacteria irritate the intestine, disrupt digestion, impair immunity, and foster fermentive degradation of certain hard-to-digest foods. The main dietary culprits being particular carbohydrates found in grains, certain starchy vegetables, certain fruits, table sugar, and lactose-rich dairy products.

What are the symptoms?

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The most common symptoms of Crohn's disease are abdominal pain, often in the lower right area, and diarrhea. Rectal bleeding, weight loss and fever may also occur. Children with Crohn's disease may suffer delayed development and stunted growth. Once the disease begins, it tends to fluctuate between periods of remission and relapse.

What are the complications of Crohn's disease?

The most common complication is blockage of the intestine. Blockage occurs because the disease tends to thicken the intestinal wall with swelling and scar tissue, narrowing the passage. Crohn's disease may also cause sores, or ulcers, that tunnel through the affected area into surrounding tissues such as the bladder, vagina, or skin. The areas around the anus and rectum are often involved. The tunnels, called fistulas, are a common complication and often become infected.

Nutritional deficiencies of proteins, calories, and vitamins are well documented in Crohn's disease. These deficiencies may be caused by inadequate dietary intake, intestinal loss of protein, or poor absorption (malabsorption).

Other complications associated with Crohn's disease include arthritis, skin problems, inflammation in the eyes or mouth, kidney stones, gallstones, or other diseases of the liver .

Treatment - Surgery , Diet or Herbs ?

Be wary of choosing surgery as a treatment (this removes part of the intestine but the inflammation tends to return next to the area of intestine that has been removed). However many Crohn's disease patients require surgery to correct complications such as blockage, perforation, abscess, or bleeding in the intestine.

People with Crohn's disease may feel well and be free of symptoms for substantial spans of time so they are able to hold jobs, raise families, and function successfully at home and in society.

No special diet has been proven effective for preventing or treating this disease, however some people find their symptoms are made worse by milk, alcohol, hot spices, or fiber. People are encouraged to follow a nutritious diet and avoid any foods that seem to worsen symptoms. But there are no consistent rules. See Elaine Gottschall's book "Breaking the Vicious Cycle"

At the site below you can see our herbal and dietary suggestions:
http://www.herbal-treatment.net/herbs_colitis_crohns_disease.html

Understanding of Crohns on an Energetic Level

On an energetic level we must understand that our bodies are not machines, we are complex, many-layered beings with a wonderful array of contradictions.

By looking at your body in this light it opens you to the possibility of actually working with your body and healing as a unified being.

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Looking specifically at IBD sufferers we often find they are the type of personality who don't show their stresses, but rather bottle it up and react to it all later, they may have difficulty swallowing life's challenges but also can't seem to make the changes required to make life better for themselves. They almost find it impossible to be honest at the moment it is needed. Emotionally they have had a "gut full" of those around them who are over exacting. They are feeling oppressed and need lots of TLC and courage to actually say what they think!

When we view our bodies from the medical model we can very easily start to view the sick parts with frustration and resentment. If you see your body in this manner, you'll just want to take the right pill and have it perform perfectly immediately! But your body is not a machine; you can't separate the parts from the whole.

Opening yourself up to the possibilities of our humanity and our unique individuality will also create a space for you to begin taking some responsibility for your present state not purely on a physical level. It may be as simple as saying "Ok, well, since I got this particular disease and not some other, there must be a reason for that. I'm going to start looking at the lessons here for me."

The doctor or scientist looking for the disease agent can not answer those questions for you. Only you can answer these questions. Only you can integrate all the levels of yourself to identify the influencing factors in your particular health process. This is your healing journey and no one else can lead the way.

Please be aware that you also have a choice as to which label or diagnosis you accept for yourself and your condition. How do you define yourself and your health? Do you see yourself as a diseased person? Then think of the implications your mind has on your healing process. Does your definition foster a healing environment for your mind/body? Or does it carry you on with a defeatist attitude?

This attitude in no way denies your actual physical health state or deludes you with positive talk. It involves full recognition of your existing physical symptoms, but within a framework of healing and positivity. It's the difference between saying, "I'm suffering from an incurable disease" and "I'm having some gastrointestinal problems".

We found the following reference helpful:

Gottschall, Elaine. Breaking the Vicious Cycle. Kirkton Press: London, Ontario, 1994. 800-332-3663.