

CROHN'S DISEASE

Crohn's disease, an inflammatory disease of the bowel and intestines, is named after Dr. Burrill Bernard Crohn, one of the first to describe the disease.

Crohn's typically affects the small intestine and the beginning of the large intestine, but it can be found in any part of the digestive tract from the mouth to the anus. It often affects the ileum, the ending part of the small intestine where it connects to the large intestine.

Crohn's is classified as an inflammatory bowel disease (IBD); as many as 70,000 cases of IBD are diagnosed each year, and perhaps a half-million people in the United States have Crohn's. Although Crohn's can occur at any age, it is typically identified between the ages of 15 and 35.

The disease may begin gradually and worsen, and it has been observed to go into remission for months or years before returning.

CAUSES

The exact cause of Crohn's and other IBDs is not known. Researchers say they might be autoimmune disorders in which the body's immune system attacks the digestive system. Those with an immediate family member who has the disease appear to be most at risk, and smoking and environmental factors also might be to blame. Stress is not thought to cause Crohn's.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms vary from person to person, but they often include persistent diarrhea, abdominal pain and cramping, and weight loss.

Other symptoms might include:

- Constipation.
- Rectal bleeding.
- Fever.
- Joint pain or soreness.
- Nausea or loss of appetite.
- Skin changes that involve red, tender bumps under the skin.

TESTING AND DIAGNOSIS

While there is no one test to determine whether a patient has Crohn's, a healthcare professional might recommend:

- Lab testing of the patient's blood and/or stool.
- X-rays of the gastrointestinal tract, perhaps using barium, a chemical that enhances the details of the image.
- Colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy.
- CT or MRI scans.
- Video capsule endoscopy.

TREATMENT

The goal of treatment is to reduce inflammation, manage symptoms, and generally try to keep Crohn's in remission.

Treatments include:

- **Medication** including anti-inflammatory drugs and biologic therapies, which target specific proteins in the immune system.
- **Modification of the diet**, perhaps introducing nutritional supplements and food that is soft and bland.
- **Surgery** might be necessary to deal with blockages, fistulas, bleeding or persistent symptoms. A doctor might recommend a bowel resection, in which a diseased section of bowel is removed and the two ends of healthy bowel are joined.

MORE INFORMATION

Experts at the **UK Inflammatory Bowel Disease Clinic** can diagnose and treat Crohn's disease symptoms. The clinic allows patients to see a gastroenterologist and a surgeon in one visit, if needed. Specialists work together to offer patients the most up-to-date information on the latest diagnosis and treatment methods.

ukhealthcare.uky.edu/digestive/ibd

859-257-1000 or

800-333-8874

The **Crohn's and Colitis Foundation** of America offers information about Crohn's and stories and suggestions about living with the disease.

crohnscolitisfoundation.org

800-932-2423