

GI Hub

Crohn's Disease Patient Handout

Crohn's disease is a **chronic condition** that causes inflammation anywhere in the digestive tract, most often in the end of the small intestine and the beginning of the colon. It can affect people of any age, but most often starts in young adults.[\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]\[4\]\[5\]\[6\]](#)

Symptoms:

Common symptoms include diarrhea, stomach pain (often in the lower right side), fatigue, weight loss, and sometimes fever. Some people may have blood in their stool, mouth sores, or urgent bowel movements. Children and teens may have slowed growth or delayed puberty. Crohn's disease can also cause problems outside the gut, such as joint pain, skin rashes, eye inflammation, and anemia.[\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]\[4\]\[5\]\[6\]\[7\]](#)

Prevalence:

Crohn's disease is becoming more common worldwide, especially in countries with Western diets and lifestyles. In North America, about 1 in 300 to 1 in 1,000 people are affected. The disease can start at any age but is most common between ages 15 and 30.[\[4\]\[8\]](#)

Genetics:

Crohn's disease tends to run in families. More than 100 genetic markers have been linked to Crohn's, but having these genes does not mean you will definitely get the disease. Environmental factors like smoking, diet, and certain medications also play a role. Smoking increases the risk of developing Crohn's disease and can make symptoms worse.[\[4\]\[8\]](#)

Diagnosis:

Doctors diagnose Crohn's disease by asking about symptoms, doing a physical exam, and ordering tests. These may include blood tests (to check for inflammation and anemia), stool tests, and special tests like colonoscopy, endoscopy, or imaging scans (CT or MRI). Sometimes, doctors use a test called fecal calprotectin to help rule out other causes of symptoms. Diagnosis can be tricky and may take time, as symptoms can look like other

conditions. Crohn's disease is often identified by patchy areas of inflammation, called "skip lesions," and can affect any part of the digestive tract. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]\[4\]\[5\]\[6\]\[7\]\[9\]\[10\]](#)

Treatment:

Treatment depends on how severe the disease is and which parts of the gut are affected. The main goals are to control inflammation, relieve symptoms, and prevent complications.

- **Medicines:** These may include anti-inflammatory drugs, steroids (for flares), immune system suppressors, and biologic medicines. Antibiotics may be used for infections or abscesses.
- **Nutrition:** Some children may use special nutrition formulas to help control inflammation.
- **Lifestyle:** Avoiding smoking is very important, as it can make Crohn's disease worse.
- **Surgery:** Many people with Crohn's disease will need surgery at some point to treat complications like blockages, abscesses, or fistulas. Surgery is not a cure, and ongoing treatment is needed after surgery. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]\[4\]\[6\]\[7\]\[8\]\[9\]](#)

Complications:

Crohn's disease can cause serious problems, including:

- Blockages or narrowing of the intestines (strictures)
- Abnormal connections between organs (fistulas)
- Abscesses (pockets of infection)
- Malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies
- Increased risk of colon cancer
- Osteoporosis (weak bones)
- Anemia (low red blood cells)
- Depression and anxiety
- Infections and blood clots

Regular check-ups and preventive care are important to catch and treat complications early. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]\[4\]\[5\]\[6\]\[7\]\[8\]\[9\]](#)

If you have Crohn's disease, working closely with your healthcare team can help you manage symptoms, prevent complications, and improve your quality of life.

References

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