

Crohn's Disease



Dr. Dykman

Crohn's Disease is a chronic disease of the intestines that causes them to become inflamed. The inflammation occurs most often in the small intestines, but can occur anywhere along the digestive tract, from the mouth to the anus. Typically, patients will have sores, ulcers and fistulas in the intestines. Inflammation may also lead to scarring and obstruction of the intestines.

The cause of Crohn's is unknown, although multiple theories have been suggested, including chronic infections and autoimmunity. To some extent, Crohn's Disease is hereditary; about 15 percent of people with Crohn's Disease have a parent or sibling who also has the disease.

Crohn's is characterized by bouts of diarrhea, bleeding and abdominal pain. Patients can also develop malnutrition, fatigue, osteoporosis and decreased immune response. Perforations, or leakage of bowel contents can be caused by fistulas (abnormal connections between the

intestines and other organs), or inflammation of the intestines. Many patients with Crohn's Disease have mild or no symptoms and rarely consult with a physician.

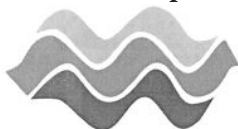
Diagnosis may be difficult with Crohn's Disease. Blood tests may show elevated white blood cell counts and anemia. The patient may have a fever, abdominal tenderness, pain or diarrhea. A colonoscopy is often recommended to help make the diagnosis. Tissue samples can be obtained for study during the colonoscopy. Radiologic and other laboratory tests are often needed to confirm the diagnosis.

Although there is no cure for Crohn's, treatment can minimize the symptoms and greatly improve the quality of life. Treatment varies dependent on the specific symptoms and their severity. There are multiple medical and surgical options available. The goal of treatment is for prolonged periods of disease remission and a normal lifestyle for the patient.

If you have a persistent change in your bowel habits, abdominal pain or bouts of diarrhea that don't respond to over the counter medications, it is important to visit your doctor.

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