

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)



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Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) is a group of inflammatory conditions affecting the large and/or small intestines. It is generally characterized by chronic abdominal pain, diarrhea, bleeding, and nutritional malabsorption. There is no one definitive answer to the causes of IBD. However, it is known that if you have a family member with an IBD, your chances of being affected are increased.

The two most common forms of IBD are Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis. The characteristics are very similar, sometimes making it difficult to distinguish between them. Both Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis cause ulcers in the intestines. Ulcerative Colitis inflames the colon and rectum and Crohn's Disease can affect anywhere along the digestive track, from the mouth to the anus. Where Ulcerative Colitis affects only the innermost layer of the intestines in a continuous pattern, Crohn's can affect the entire bowel wall and skip areas of the bowel along its course. The ulcers create mucus and pus and blood. The inflammation causes cramping and chronic diarrhea. The chronic inflammation and injury to the colon can cause irreversible damage.

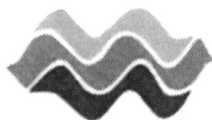
What causes Crohn's and Ulcerative Colitis? Nobody knows for sure. Both diseases are marked by an abnormal response to the body's own immune system. For this reason, they are considered autoimmune diseases. They are also hereditary. If a first degree family member has it, your chances of having it are approximately 15%. They are not contagious nor caused by stress.

In order to properly diagnose Crohn's or Ulcerative Colitis, a colonoscopy is usually recommended. During a colonoscopy, the gastroenterologist can view the entire colon and remove tissue for biopsies.

Although there is no cure for IBD, excellent treatment is available. Treatment will not only help the physical symptoms, but also the emotional. Treatment is designed to control the inflammatory reaction and restore losses of fluid, salts, and blood. Most patients feel following a healthy diet and developing a treatment plan with their gastroenterologist helps improve their quality of life. Further information can be found at the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America website www.ccfa.org. The physicians of Anne Arundel Gastroenterology work directly with the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America and have provided expert medical advice at local events.

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