

Inflammatory bowel disease

What is inflammatory bowel disease?

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is the medical term for Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. With IBD, parts of the digestive system become inflamed, red, swollen and raw. This can cause sores called ulcers, bleeding and scarring.

Common symptoms of IBD include:

- abdominal pain
- cramping
- feeling tired
- diarrhea

Anyone can develop IBD, no matter what age, gender or race. IBD affects people in different ways. Some have mild symptoms, others have more severe symptoms.

IBD is a chronic disease. It is unpredictable. IBD can flare up and be active. Then there are quiet times with few symptoms, called remission. There is no cure for IBD, however, surgery can remove the diseased bowel in some patients with ulcerative colitis.

Although no one knows exactly what causes IBD, it may be an autoimmune disorder. This means that the immune system has become overactive. Instead of finding and destroying 'foreign' cells that come into the body (such as bacteria, viruses and other germs), the overactive immune system mistakenly attacks the body's own cells.

Understanding IBD: A glossary of terms

Amylase	An enzyme made in the pancreas. A high level of amylase in the blood can be a sign of inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis).
Anti-inflammatory	A medication that works to reduce inflammation.
Autoimmune disorder	A condition in which the body's immune system mistakenly attacks its own healthy cells.
Crohn's Disease	An inflammatory bowel disease. Any part of the digestive system can be involved, from the mouth to the anus. Patches of inflammation may occur. The inflammation can affect all layers of the bowel tissue.
Diarrhea	Frequent, loose bowel movements.
Digestive system	The parts of the body that get food into, through and out of the body. Parts include: mouth, esophagus, stomach, liver, gallbladder, pancreas, small intestine, large intestine (colon) and rectum. The digestive system gets nutrients out of food and into the body.
Immune	Protected against an infectious disease, either naturally or by receiving a vaccine.
Immune system	A collection of organs and cells in the body that defend against infection and disease.
Immunosuppressive	A medication that reduces the activity of the immune system.
Inflammatory Bowel Disease	A term that describes Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. Also called IBD. A chronic disease in which parts of the digestive system become inflamed.
Jaundice	Yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes. Often a sign of liver problems.
Pancreatitis	Inflammation of the pancreas.
Prednisone	A medication called a steroid that works to reduce and prevent inflammation.
Symptom	A feeling or physical sign of a particular health condition.
Ulcerative Colitis	An inflammatory bowel disease that affects only the large intestine (colon) and rectum.
Vaccine	Living or killed microorganisms (bacteria or viruses) that are usually given by a needle (injection) to make the person become immune to an infectious disease.