

# Understanding Crohn's disease

Crohn's disease is a type of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) that impacts the entire digestive tract. Most commonly, it causes inflammation and dysfunction of the small intestine and the beginning of the large intestine.

While there is no cure, effective treatments can manage symptoms.



## SYMPTOMS

Symptoms may vary depending on the part of the digestive tract affected and the degree of inflammation. Common symptoms include:

- Diarrhea
- Abdominal pain and cramping
- Weight loss
- Anemia
- Fatigue
- Fever
- Nausea and loss of appetite
- Joint pain
- Eye redness
- Skin changes

## CAUSES

The exact cause of Crohn's disease is unknown. In some cases, it may be caused by an autoimmune reaction in which the immune system mistakenly attacks the cells of the digestive tract.

### Risk factors include:

- Family history
- Smoking
- Medications such as birth control, antibiotics, aspirin, and ibuprofen may slightly increase risk.
- High-fat diet
- Age. Those in their 20s are more likely to develop Crohn's disease.

## TREATMENT

Treatment aims to decrease the inflammation in the intestines and prevent complications. A doctor is the best resource for treatment options and an individualized plan. They may recommend:

- **Medications:** These may be used to decrease inflammation and reduce the activity of the immune system. Some medicines can also relieve symptoms, such as antidiarrheals and pain medication.
- **Bowl rest:** If the digestive tract is very inflamed, it may need time to rest and heal. Avoiding solid food and drinking only liquids may be required for a brief time. To maintain nutrition, a doctor may recommend liquid supplements or IV nutrition.
- **Diet:** Specific foods may cause discomfort or pain during a flare-up. Following a healthy diet and paying attention to foods that cause trouble can help manage symptoms.
- **Surgery:** If other treatments are ineffective, a doctor may recommend surgery to remove a part of the intestines that has become damaged. This is not a cure but may improve quality of life.

