



## Crohn's and Colitis

November 2012

### November is Crohn's and Colitis Awareness Month

**Crohn's disease and Ulcerative Colitis** are the two most common types of inflammatory bowel disease.

**Colitis** is inflammation (swelling) of the large intestine (the colon). It usually affects the lower section (the sigmoid colon) and the rectum but it can affect the entire colon. This disease can affect people of any age but most people are diagnosed before they are 30 years old. The cause of colitis is unknown but it is thought to be caused by the immune system over reacting to the normal bacteria that lives in the digestive tract. Other bacteria or viruses may also be involved. The main symptoms of colitis include stomach pain or cramps, diarrhea, and bleeding from the rectum. Sometimes there is a fever, lack of appetite, weight loss, and in severe cases, diarrhea stools multiple times a day. Tests used in diagnosing colitis include a colonoscopy, blood test to check for inflammation and infection, and a stool sample to look for infection, blood, and white blood cells. Treatment of mild colitis can include over the counter medication for diarrhea. Prescription medicines used to treat colitis include aminosalicylates, which are antibacterials, steroids for the inflammation, and medicines to help reduce the body's immune response to prevent or reduce symptoms and prevent flare ups.

**What can you do if you have Colitis:** Eat a balanced, healthy diet and if certain foods make symptoms worse, be sure to avoid them. If symptoms continue to be severe and medication does not help, surgery to remove the colon will provide a permanent cure and provide prevention from colon cancer. Living with colitis can be challenging. Needing to go to the bathroom many times a day and not knowing when a flare up will happen can be stressful. Be sure to seek support from family, friends or a counselor. Talking with other people living with colitis can be very helpful. The Crohn's and Colitis Foundation's website has information and support. Go to [www.ccfa.org](http://www.ccfa.org) for more information.

**Crohn's disease** is a life long inflammatory condition where parts of the bowel get swollen and have deep sores called ulcers. The most common areas that are affected are the area between the small and large intestine but any part of the digestive tract, from the mouth to the anus, can be involved. It is still not known what causes Crohn's but it is thought to be from the body's immune system responding abnormally to the normal bacteria in the digestive system. Other bacteria and viruses may also be involved. Crohn's disease runs in families and smoking increases the risk. Common symptoms of Crohn's are similar to colitis and include abdominal pain, diarrhea, sometimes with blood, and unwanted weight loss. Infections, hormone changes and smoking can cause symptoms of Crohn's to flare up. Many people will have mild symptoms or have long periods of time symptom free. Signs that Crohn's is getting worse include feeling faint, a fast, weak pulse, severe belly pain, fever or shaking chills, and vomiting over and over. If any of these symptoms are present, call the doctor RIGHT AWAY. Tests to diagnose Crohn's disease include barium x-ray of the intestine, colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy—a thin, lighted tube is used to look inside the colon. While the doctor is looking with the scope, a biopsy of the colon tissue can be taken. A stool sample will be used to look for blood and infection. Treatment will depend on symptoms and how bad they are. The most common treatment for Crohn's disease is medicine. Mild symptoms of Crohn's disease may be treated with over-the-counter medicines to stop diarrhea. Talk with your doctor before you take them because they can cause side effects.

Prescription medicines to help control inflammation in the intestines and keep the disease from causing symptoms are used. When there are no symptoms, you are in remission. These medicines also help heal damaged tissue and can postpone the need for surgery. Alternative therapies to improve well-being have not been proven effective for Crohn's disease, but they may help you cope. These include massage therapy, supplements such as vitamins D and B12, and herbs like aloe and ginseng.

Crohn's disease makes it hard for your body to absorb nutrients from food. A meal plan that focuses on high-calorie, high-protein foods can help you get the nutrients you need. Eating this way may be easier if you have regular meals plus two or three snacks each day. Exercise and not smoking are additional things you can do to feel better. Smoking makes Crohn's disease worse so if you don't smoke, good. If you smoke, stop. There is free help available to stop smoking. Call the Illinois Tobacco Quitline at 1.866.QUIT.YES.

Having Crohn's disease can be stressful. The disease affects every part of your life including your ability to work. Find supportive family members and friends. Consider Palliative Care and support groups are available. In the Quad Cities there is a Crohn's support group at Trinity at Terrace Park, call Lisa at 563.386.3220 for more information.

