

## AGA Patient Information Section

## Inflammatory Bowel Disease

### What is Inflammatory Bowel Disease?

Inflammatory bowel disease, or IBD, is an autoimmune, long-term health issue that causes inflammation, or swelling, and ulcerations, or sores, in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. There are two main types of inflammatory bowel disease: **ulcerative colitis** and **Crohn's disease**.

IBD causes the body and immune system to think that food, bacteria and other needed things in the intestine are not supposed to be there. With this, the body attacks the cells of the bowels, causing inflammation that does not go away easily.

Both ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease have times of remission (when you feel well) and relapse (when you feel ill).

IBD is often found in people in their late teens and 20s, though it can be found at any age.

### Symptoms

IBD can differ from person to person and depend on the type of inflammatory bowel disease.

**Ulcerative colitis** is inflammation in the large bowel or rectum and can cause:

- Diarrhea (loose stool).
- Cramps.
- Rectal bleeding.
- Joint pain or soreness.
- Eye irritation.
- Certain rashes.

**Crohn's disease** is inflammation or ulceration throughout the GI tract and can cause:

- Cramps/belly pain (often in the lower right side).
- Diarrhea.
- Weight loss.
- Bleeding.
- Skin rash.
- Arthritis (painful, swollen joints).
- Red, swollen eyes.
- Fatigue.

### Testing

Testing is used to support the gastroenterologist's clinical suspicion that IBD is the cause of symptoms.

#### Blood Tests

A blood test can show anemia (low iron in your blood, which can make you feel weak and tired), caused by bleeding or signs of inflammation or infection somewhere in the body.

#### Stool Tests

Stool tests are done to make sure there aren't other GI health problems, such as infection, causing symptoms. Stool tests can

show if there is bleeding in the bowels and may show if there is inflammation.

### Other Tests

Certain tests can be done to better see whether there is inflammation in the bowels, narrowing, ulcers, or a block. Endoscopic test could be a colonoscopy, upper GI endoscopy, small bowel capsule endoscopy, or capsule endoscopy. Other tests often ordered include small bowel x-ray, MRI enterography, or a CT scan.

### Treatment

Though IBD is a long-term health problem, there are ways to help treat and control symptoms and put the disease in remission. Medication, nutrition, emotional support and surgery are the best things that gastroenterologists often use to keep IBD patients healthy.

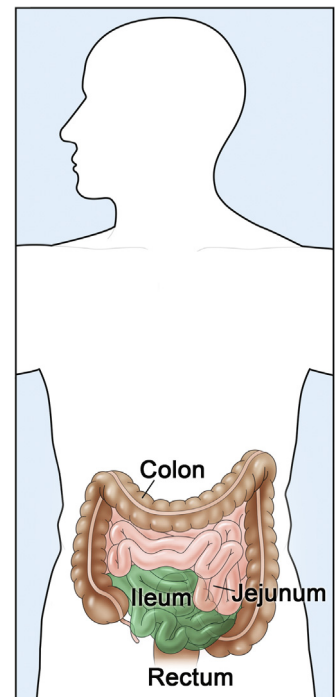
Your doctor can help you decide on the best course of care for you and your disease. Each choice targets IBD and its symptoms. Working with your health-care team can make sure that you know how to keep up with your care.

### Learn More

Despite the chronic nature of IBD, most people have a normal life span and a good quality of life. It is important to know the steps needed to take care of the disease and to be educated on possible issues that could come up and when to alert your health-care team.

- Know your body and how IBD impacts you.
- Learn to care for yourself — have control over those things you can control.
- Build a support system that works for you: family, friends and support groups.

Be sure to follow the steps to take care of yourself, given by your health-care team.



For more on IBD and other GI conditions and procedures, visit [patientinfo.gastro.org](http://patientinfo.gastro.org)

Reprints of the Patient Education Section can be ordered through our publisher, Elsevier. Please see the Information for Authors and Readers for contact information.