

# Crohn's Disease

## What Is Crohn's Disease?

Crohn's disease is a chronic, non-infectious inflammatory condition affecting the digestive tract. It is a form of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) that can cause inflammation anywhere from the mouth to the anus.

Around 1 in 1,000 people in the UK have Crohn's disease, with 3,000 to 6,000 new cases diagnosed each year. The ileum (the last part of the small intestine) is the most commonly affected area, but inflammation can also occur in the colon, rectum, and anal region.

In severe cases, Crohn's disease can lead to narrowing of the bowel (strictures), abscesses, and fistulas.

## What Causes Crohn's Disease?

The exact cause of Crohn's disease is unknown, but it is believed to involve an abnormal immune response. Key risk factors include:

- **Genetics** - Having a close family member with Crohn's disease increases your risk
- **Immune system** - The immune system attacks the bowel lining, causing inflammation
- **Smoking** - A major risk factor for developing and worsening Crohn's disease
- **Ethnicity** - More common in people of Caucasian descent compared to those of Black or Asian backgrounds

## Symptoms Of Crohn's Disease

Symptoms vary depending on the area of the digestive tract affected. The most common symptoms include:

- **Cramping abdominal pain** - Often worsens after eating
- **Frequent diarrhoea** - Loose stools, sometimes containing blood and mucus
- **Unintended weight loss**

- **Fatigue and weakness**
- **Mouth ulcers**
- **Abscesses, infections, or fistulas around the anus**

**Less common symptoms can include:**

- **Joint pain and swelling**
- **Skin rashes and ulcers**
- **Eye inflammation**

Crohn's disease symptoms can overlap with other conditions such as ulcerative colitis and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), making accurate diagnosis essential.

## How Is Crohn's Disease Diagnosed?

Crohn's disease is most commonly diagnosed between the ages of 10 and 40, but it can be confirmed at any age. There is no single test for diagnosis, and multiple investigations may be required.

Your doctor may recommend:

- **Blood tests** - To check for inflammation and infection
- **Stool tests** - To rule out infections that could cause similar symptoms
- **Flexible sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy** - A camera examination of the bowel to assess inflammation and take biopsies
- **MRI enteroclysis** - A non-invasive scan to assess the small intestine
- **CT scan** - Helps detect inflammation, strictures, and abscesses in the bowel
- **MRI scan** - Particularly useful for evaluating fistulas and abscesses around the anus

## Treatment For Crohn's Disease

Treatment aims to control inflammation, relieve symptoms, and prevent complications.

### Medical treatment

You may be prescribed:

- **5-ASA drugs** - Anti-inflammatory medications for the bowel
- **Steroids** - Used in short courses to reduce inflammation during flare-ups
- **Immunosuppressants (e.g., azathioprine)** - Help regulate immune response
- **Biologic therapies (anti-TNF drugs like infliximab)** - Target specific immune system proteins to reduce inflammation
- **Antibiotics** - Used to treat infections, abscesses, or fistulas

### Surgical treatment

Surgery is not a cure for Crohn's disease, but it may be required if:

- There is **narrowing or blockage (stricture)** in the bowel
- There are **abscesses or fistulas** that do not respond to medication
- There is **severe inflammation** that does not improve with medical treatment

**Common surgical procedures include:**

- **Right hemicolectomy** - Removal of the right side of the colon
- **Ileocolic resection** - Removal of the last part of the small intestine and the first part of the colon
- **Left hemicolectomy** - Removal of the left side of the colon
- **Sigmoid colectomy** - Removal of the sigmoid colon
- **Subtotal colectomy or pan-proctocolectomy** - Removal of most or all of the colon

- **Loop ileostomy** - A temporary or permanent stoma to allow the bowel to rest

## Perianal Crohn's disease treatment

If you have abscesses or fistulas around the anus, you may need:

- **Drainage procedures** to remove pus from abscesses
- **Seton placement** - A drainage tube to keep fistulas open and promote healing

## Lifestyle Advice For Managing Crohn's Disease

- **Stop smoking** - Smoking increases the risk of flare-ups and complications
- **Monitor your diet** - Some foods, like high-fibre or fatty foods, may worsen symptoms
- **Manage stress** - Psychological stress can trigger flare-ups

## Why Choose The Midlands Bowel Clinic?

- **Specialist colorectal consultants** with expertise in inflammatory bowel disease
- **Advanced diagnostic tools** for accurate assessment
- **Personalised treatment plans** including medical and surgical management

## Contact Us

If you have symptoms of Crohn's disease or need expert advice, contact us today. Early diagnosis and effective treatment can help control symptoms and improve quality of life.