

Ulcerative Colitis

What Is Ulcerative Colitis?

Ulcerative colitis is a chronic inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) that causes inflammation and ulceration of the inner lining of the large intestine (colon and rectum). The ulcers can bleed and produce mucus or pus, leading to discomfort and digestive issues.

If only the rectum is affected, the condition is known as proctitis.

Who Is Affected?

- One in 500 people in the UK are affected by ulcerative colitis
- Between 6,000 and 12,000 new cases are diagnosed each year
- Men and women are equally affected
- It is more common in white Europeans and less common in Asian populations

What Causes Ulcerative Colitis?

The exact cause is unknown, but it is believed to be due to an abnormal immune response that leads to inflammation in the gut. Other contributing factors include:

- **Genetics** - A family history increases the risk
- **Environmental factors** - Diet and lifestyle may play a role

Symptoms Of Ulcerative Colitis

Symptoms vary depending on the extent and severity of inflammation.

Common symptoms

- Frequent loose stools (diarrhoea)
- Rectal bleeding
- Mucus in the stools
- Constant urge to pass stools (tenesmus)
- Abdominal pain and cramping
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fatigue and low energy
- Dehydration in severe cases

Less common symptoms

- Skin rashes
- Eye inflammation and irritation
- Joint pain and swelling

Ulcerative colitis is a long-term condition where symptoms may go into remission for long periods before flare-ups occur.

How Is Ulcerative Colitis Diagnosed?

A specialist consultation and tests are required to confirm the diagnosis, assess the extent of inflammation, and rule out other conditions.

Diagnostic tests include:

- **Blood tests** - To check for anaemia and inflammation markers
- **Stool tests** - To rule out infections that could mimic IBD

- **Rigid sigmoidoscopy** - A quick examination of the rectum in the clinic
- **Flexible sigmoidoscopy** - Examines the lower bowel for inflammation and allows biopsies to be taken
- **Colonoscopy** - A detailed examination of the entire colon, often used to assess disease severity and take biopsies
- **MRI or CT scans** - Used in specific cases to assess complications

Treatment For Ulcerative Colitis

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

Medical treatments include:

- **5-ASA drugs** - Anti-inflammatory medications for mild to moderate cases
- **Steroids** - Used for short-term flare-ups
- **Immunosuppressants (e.g., azathioprine)** - Help control inflammation by modifying the immune system
- **Biologic therapies (anti-TNF drugs like infliximab)** - Target specific immune pathways to control inflammation
- **Topical treatments (suppositories and enemas)** - Used when inflammation is limited to the rectum or lower bowel
- **Intravenous therapy** - Some medications may be given via a drip in hospital for severe flare-ups

Surgical treatment for ulcerative colitis

Surgery is recommended when:

- Medical treatment is ineffective
- There are severe complications such as bowel perforation

- There is a high risk of colorectal cancer

Surgical procedures include:

- **Pan-proctocolectomy** - Removal of the colon and rectum, which cures ulcerative colitis
- **Ileostomy** - Some patients opt for a permanent stoma (external bag for waste)
- **Ileal pouch surgery (J-pouch)** - A pouch made from the small intestine is created to store stool, allowing normal bowel control

Most ulcerative colitis surgeries, including ileal pouch procedures, can be performed using minimally invasive (keyhole) techniques for faster recovery.

Ulcerative Colitis And Cancer Risk

- Patients with ulcerative colitis for over 10 years have a higher risk of colorectal cancer
- The risk increases further if a close relative has had bowel cancer
- Regular colonoscopy screenings are recommended for early detection

Why Choose The Midlands Bowel Clinic?

- Specialist gastroenterologists and colorectal surgeons with expertise in IBD management
- Advanced diagnostic techniques for accurate assessment
- Personalised treatment plans tailored to your needs
- Minimally invasive surgery options for quicker recovery
- Ongoing care and follow-up to manage long-term health

Contact Us

If you have symptoms of ulcerative colitis, contact us today to discuss your diagnosis and treatment options.