

TO YOUR HEALTH

Ulcerative Colitis

What Is Ulcerative Colitis?

Ulcerative colitis is a chronic inflammatory disease of the large intestine, in which the inner lining of the colon develops tiny sores, or ulcers. The ulcers produce pus and mucous and cause abdominal pain, along with the need to frequently empty your colon. Ulcerative colitis can occur in people of any age. However, it is more likely to develop in people between the ages of 15 and 30 or those older than 60.

What Are The Symptoms?

Symptoms of ulcerative colitis can be mild to severe and can vary from person to person. They often begin gradually and can become worse over time. The most common signs and symptoms of ulcerative colitis are:

- Loose and urgent bowel movements
- Abdominal cramps and pain
- Blood or pus in the stool
- Nausea or loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Feeling tired and anemia

Have The Causes Been Identified?

The exact cause of ulcerative colitis is still unknown. Researchers believe that several factors may contribute, including an abnormal immune response, genetics, microbiome, and environmental factors. How these factors may cause ulcerative colitis are not yet fully understood.

How Is Ulcerative Colitis Diagnosed?

Your gastroenterologist may recommend different diagnostic tests to help diagnose ulcerative colitis. Initially, laboratory tests of your blood and fecal matter may be ordered, to look for signs of infection, anemia, bacteria or other conditions that may be causing symptoms.

Further testing to confirm the diagnosis may be necessary. Colonoscopy of the large intestine, performed by a gastroenterologist, is the most accurate methods for diagnosing ulcerative colitis and ruling out other possible conditions. An endoscopy allows your doctor to examine the inside of your colon and rectum with a lighted tube inserted through your anus, while under sedation. A colonoscopy examines your entire colon. During the endoscopy procedure, a biopsy, or a small piece of tissue, may be removed for further testing and analysis.

What Treatments Are Available?

Today there are a number of effective medications available to treat ulcerative colitis, including sulfa drugs, corticosteroids, immunosuppressive agents, and biologic therapies. These drugs help to suppress the inflammation of the colon and allow the colon lining to heal. In addition to controlling and suppressing symptoms (inducing remission), medication can also be used to decrease the frequency of symptom flare ups (maintaining remission).

For about twenty five percent of patients with ulcerative colitis, medicines alone are not effective in



treatment. In these cases, surgery may be considered. The operation involves the removal of the colon (colectomy). Today, new surgical techniques are available that avoid an ileostomy (external waste pouch). The benefits and risks of any surgery, should be discussed carefully with your doctor.

What Role Does Diet Play?

The food you eat does not cause ulcerative colitis. However, certain foods may aggravate symptoms when your disease is active. It is essential to maintain good nutrition to help your body heal.

Many people with ulcerative colitis find that soft, bland foods cause less discomfort than spicy or high-fiber foods. Your doctor may also recommend vitamins or nutritional supplements. Colitis is very treatable and most will live a normal life.



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