



Patient Counseling Report

➤ CROHN'S DISEASE

WHAT IS CROHN'S DISEASE?

Crohn's disease is a chronic disorder that causes inflammation of the digestive or gastrointestinal (GI) tract. It most often affects the small intestine and/or colon, however it can involve any area of the GI tract from the mouth to the anus. There are multiple layers of the small intestine and all may be inflamed in individuals with Crohn's disease. In most cases, there is normal healthy bowel in between patches of diseased bowel. Crohn's and a similar disease, ulcerative colitis, are grouped under the category of diseases known as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). It is estimated that nearly half of a million Americans have Crohn's disease. Crohn's disease affects both males and females primarily between the ages of 15-35.

Crohn's disease is associated with a slightly increased risk of small intestinal and colorectal cancer.

HOW IS CROHN'S DISEASE DIAGNOSED?

There is no individual test that can definitively diagnose Crohn's disease. To accurately diagnose Crohn's disease, your doctor will evaluate the results of laboratory tests, X-rays and findings on endoscopy and pathology tests. Additional testing may be performed to eliminate other conditions from consideration because the symptoms of Crohn's disease can mimic those of other gastrointestinal disorders.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF CROHN'S DISEASE?

Individuals with Crohn's disease can experience a wide range of symptoms varying from mild to severe. During times of remission, symptoms may be mild and during flare-ups symptoms may become more severe.

Common symptoms an individual may experience are:

- Prolonged diarrhea
- Bloody diarrhea
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fever
- Abdominal pain

WHO IS AT RISK FOR DEVELOPING CROHN'S DISEASE?

Some of the most common risk factors are:

- Family history
- Certain ethnic groups including American Jews of European descent, Caucasians and African Americans
- Environment

WHAT TREATMENT OPTIONS DO I HAVE?

Your doctor may perform an endoscopic examination which may include a colonoscopy and an endoscopy of the stomach and small intestine to diagnose and monitor your Crohn's disease. The treatment for Crohn's disease depends on the location and severity of disease, complications and response to previous treatment.

The goals of treatment are to control inflammation, correct nutritional deficiencies, and relieve symptoms such as abdominal pain, diarrhea, and rectal bleeding. The main treatment alternatives are drugs, nutritional supplements or surgery. Unfortunately, there is no cure for Crohn's disease, however, treatment will help with the symptoms. Only a physician can determine the most appropriate treatment.

Drug Therapy: Medication is usually prescribed to help reduce inflammation. In addition, your doctor may prescribe a drug to help suppress or modify the immune system and an antibiotic to treat bacterial overgrowth.

Nutrition: Attention to your diet is critical in reducing symptoms and maintaining good nutritional status. Many times individuals with Crohn's disease experience loss of appetite and have increased caloric needs. These individuals may benefit from the inclusion of a nutritional supplement to their diet. Generally speaking, soft and bland foods are tolerated better than hot and spicy foods.

Surgery: Surgery may be recommended when medication is no longer effective in controlling the symptoms of Crohn's disease. It may be useful in repairing fistulas or removing bowel obstructions. During surgery the surgeon will remove the affected portion of the bowel and sew together the two remaining segments again, which is also known as a bowel re-section.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I ASK MY DOCTOR?

Are there any other tests that we need to perform?

What treatment do you suggest?

What are the benefits and risks of this type of treatment?

What can I do to best manage this disease?

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

American Gastroenterological Association: www.gastro.org

American College of Gastroenterology: www.acg.gi.org

American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy: www.asge.org

Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America: www.cdfa.org