Crohn’s Disease

What is Crohn’s Disease?

Crohn’s disease is a chronic inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) affecting the digestive tract. It results in the swelling or inflammation of the intestines, which may result in permanent damage, and impact everyday life during disease flares. It is estimated that approximately 12.6 million people worldwide have IBD.

Symptoms

For many patients, Crohn’s disease occurs in the colon or the third segment of the small intestine, the ileum, but may occur in any part of the intestinal tract. Signs and symptoms of Crohn’s disease can range from mild to severe. Most often, symptoms appear gradually, but can sometimes develop suddenly without warning. Patients with Crohn’s disease may experience ongoing disease symptoms, or have episodes of symptom-free remission, which can be followed by relapse or flares.

Patients with Crohn’s disease are at an increased risk of developing colorectal cancer.

Effect on Quality of Life

Living with Crohn’s disease may severely affect quality of life both physically and psychologically, particularly during disease flares and relapses.

Prevalence

Crohn’s disease has been shown to affect North American and Western European countries more heavily than others. However, Crohn’s disease rates are on the rise among other countries and areas of the world.

Diagnosis & Treatment

There is no single test to identify a patient who might have Crohn’s disease. Typically, physicians will conduct a number of tests, including:

- Physical exam
- Computed tomography (CT) scan
- Blood test
- Intestinal endoscopy

There are treatment options available that can help manage flares and keep patients in remission, including:

- Corticosteroids
- Immunomodulators
- Biologics
- Elemental diets
- Surgery

Studies have shown the prevalence of Crohn’s disease has increased over time, though researchers have been unable to identify a single cause for this increase.

While Crohn’s disease can affect people of all ages, disease onset is commonly between the ages of 15 to 35, with men and women affected equally. Patients may have a higher chance of developing Crohn’s disease if they have a blood relative with an IBD or if they smoke cigarettes.