What is Crohn's Disease?

Crohn's disease (CD) is a chronic autoimmune disorder affecting the digestive tract. Unlike inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), which is similar to irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), Crohn's disease is not limited to the colon and can affect any part of the digestive tract, including the small intestine, the ileum, but may occur in the colon as well. Most often, symptoms appear gradually, but can sometimes develop suddenly or without warning. 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 or 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 may experience additional complications, including a higher risk for developing CRC.

Symptoms

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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. Psychological hurdles may include: poor body image; social isolation or perceived stigma; stress or anxiety related to the uncertain nature of disease, including flare timing, ability to locate restroom, etc.; social isolation or perceived stigma surrounding bowel-related symptoms; and poor body image.

Prevalence

Crohn’s disease has been shown to affect North American and Western European countries more heavily than others, with more than 750,000 people living with Crohn’s disease in the United States alone. However, Crohn’s disease rates are on the rise among other countries and areas of the world. Studies have shown the prevalence of Crohn’s disease has increased over time, though researchers have been unable to identify a cause for this spike.

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
- Upper gastrointestinal series
- Computed tomography (CT) scan
- Blood test
- Intestinal endoscopy

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

- Aminosalicylates
- Corticosteroids
- Immunosuppressors
- Biologics
- Bowel rest
- Surgery

When the disease is active, symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Soreness inside the mouth
- Weight loss
- Abdominal pain
- Extraintestinal symptoms (skin rashes, arthritis, swelling of the hands and feet, etc.)
- Anal fissures
- Sudden, uncontrollable need for restroom
- Diarrhea

While Crohn’s disease can affect people of all ages, it is most likely to develop between ages 20 and 29, 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.

Bristol-Myers Squibb is committed to identifying and pursuing new treatment options and innovative development approaches to help deliver transformational medicines for patients with Crohn’s disease and other autoimmune diseases.