

# Crohn's Disease Information

Contributed by Shelly Carpsten  
Friday, 03 November 2006

Crohn's disease is a progressive disease of the gastro-intestinal tract that is considered an autoimmune disorder. It's related to ulcerative colitis in that they both involve heavy inflammation of the GI tract, but where ulcerative colitis always targets the colon, Crohn's disease can target any part of the GI tract from the mouth to the anus. Typically, Crohn's disease only affects areas of the large intestine. Because Crohn's disease is most commonly associated with the large intestine, the most common symptoms are diarrhea or constipation, and abdominal pain and cramping.

Like all autoimmune disorders, Crohn's disease is a pretty serious condition, and there isn't really any cure for it. There are some new treatments available, but nothing that will cure it outright. Some people seem to get occasional flare ups from their Crohn's disease, but more or less live normal lives. Others suffer from chronic flare ups their entire lives, which can sometimes lead to more serious complications.

So it's not really the best thing to have, but it isn't always severe. One of my good friends in college had Crohn's disease but you wouldn't ever know it. He'd apparently had a couple of flare-ups in high school, but hasn't had one since and he's almost 30 now.

The medications you take if you are having a flare up are basically immunosuppressant sorts of drugs and of course steroids, neither of which aren't really all that pleasant to take. They both have a lot of side effects, and the immunosuppressants boost your chances of getting some kind of opportunistic infection.

Crohn's disease isn't at all contagious, and it isn't really well understood what causes it. The immune system is a very complicated thing, and we have only a very limited understanding of it. Genetics, stress, and viruses are all commonly thought to cause autoimmune disorders like Crohn's disease, but there isn't any really strong connections to anything. Crohn's disease does seem to run in families (my friend's dad also had it) so there probably is a genetic component to it.

If you think you may have Crohn's disease, you probably don't. First of all it's a pretty rare condition, and there are literally hundreds of other diseases out there with the same types of symptoms. The kind of pain and diarrhea you get with Crohn's is a lot more severe than the normal kind, so don't freak out if you are experiencing some mild discomfort. If you want to know more about it, ask your doctor!