

ULCERATIVE COLITIS

Ulcerative colitis is an *inflammation* (swelling, tenderness, warmth) of the lining of the large intestine (colon). The inflammation can prevent water and nutrients from being properly absorbed into the bloodstream, create *sores* (ulcerations), or lead to bleeding and other problems. The cause is not known but there are several theories. It may occur if another family member also has it, but this is not always the case. It may be related to changes in the *immune system* (the body's defense system) or diet factors. Although stress can aggravate ulcerative colitis, it does not appear to cause it. It is most common in ages 15–40.

Symptoms *may* include:

- Diarrhea, usually watery with blood or mucous
- Abdominal cramping, weight loss, and loss of appetite
- Bleeding from the rectum, body fatigue, and fevers
- Signs of *dehydration* (lethargy, sunken eyes, less urination, rapid weight loss or dry skin)

What *your doctor* can do:

- Diagnose the disease by asking about your symptoms and medical history, performing a physical exam and ordering laboratory blood and stool tests.
- Perform special X-rays or an *endoscopy* (use a long, thin, flexible tube with a light and optics to view and take tissue samples from the colon).
- Prescribe medications to decrease the inflammation and reduce the diarrhea.
- Perform a nutritional assessment and prescribe a special diet to help relieve your symptoms and to help you get the nutrition you need.
- Treat complications such as bleeding and infection.
- Recommend hospitalization when symptoms are severe. It may be necessary to let the colon rest and have an *intravenous* (IV) line to provide fluids and nutrition.
- Recommend surgery if the disease is severe or to treat complications.

What *you* can do:

- Work closely with your doctor to determine the treatments that are best for you.
- Take the medicines prescribed by your doctor. Let your doctor know if you are having uncomfortable side effects. DO NOT stop your medicines without talking to your doctor.
- Different foods and diets are best for different people with ulcerative colitis. Foods you may need to avoid include *caffeine* (coffee, tea, colas), spicy foods, milk products, and raw fruits and vegetables. Learn what type of diet works best for you.
- Try eating several small meals a day instead of three large ones.
- Contact the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation at toll-free 1-800-932-2423 for more information.

What *you* can expect:

- Ulcerative colitis is a chronic disease with *remissions* (times when there are no symptoms) and *relapses* (times when the symptoms flare up again).
- Treatment can delay or control symptoms, but there is no cure.
- Complications may include severe blood loss, malnutrition, or obstruction of the bowel.
- The risk of colon cancer is greater for those with ulcerative colitis.

Contact your doctor if your symptoms worsen, you develop fever and chills, or you have side effects from the treatment. Keep appointments for regular check-ups even if you are not having symptoms.