

# Crohn's Disease

## Dr. Raju Kanakia

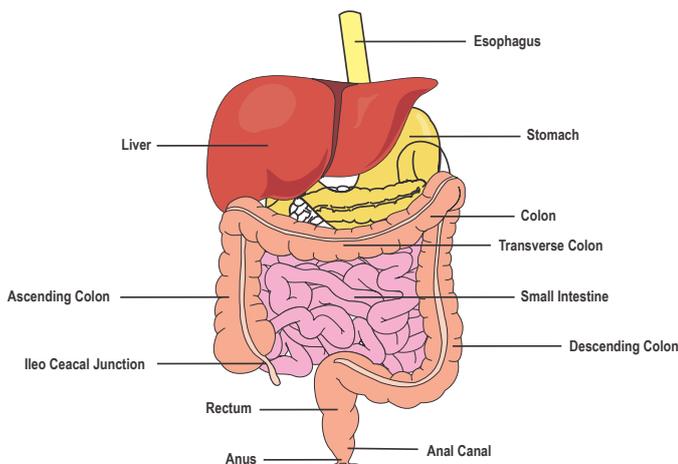
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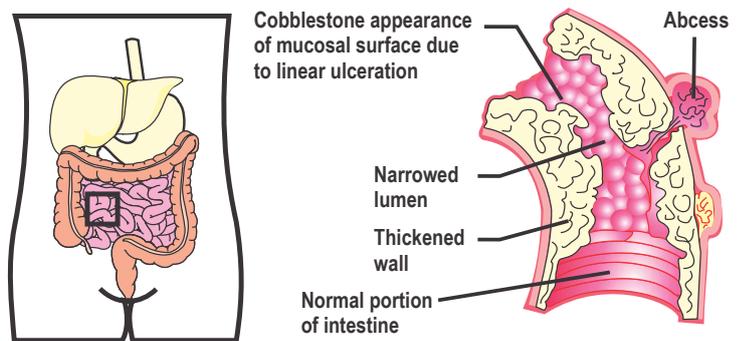
### What is the small intestine?

The small intestine is a part of the gastro intestinal (GI) tract which begins at the mouth. It is situated after the stomach and ends at the ileo-cecal junction where it opens into the large intestine or colon. It is an important part of the digestive system because digestion as well as absorption occurs here. It consists of the duodenum, jejunum and ileum. It is 7 metres in length, and folds upon itself numerous times to fit into the abdominal cavity.



### What is Crohn's disease?

Crohn's disease is an inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). It causes inflammation i.e. irritation and swelling in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, especially the ileum, and the first part of the large intestine. It results in inflammation i.e. irritation and swelling of the small intestine as well as causes ulcers. The inflammation makes it difficult to absorb nutrients during digestion. Crohn's disease is marked by periods of remission and periods of relapse.



### Who is more likely to get Crohn's disease?

Patients with Crohn's disease have other family members who are also affected, as Crohn's disease may run in families. It commonly occurs in young men and women between 20 and 30 years.

### How is Crohn's disease caused?

The exact cause of Crohn's disease is not known. It results from interplay of three important factors:

**Autoimmune reaction** – generally the immune system defends the body from external invaders like bacteria, viruses, fungi etc. In patients with Crohn's disease, the immune system thinks food, friendly bacteria and other things are not supposed to be there, and the body reacts and causes inflammation and subsequent damage to the small intestine.  
**Genetics** – Crohn's disease runs in families and patients often have relatives suffering from inflammatory bowel disease.

**Environmental factors** – like smoking, certain medicines, high-fat diet may increase the risk slightly of getting Crohn's disease. Stress and diet do not cause Crohn's disease, but may worsen symptoms.

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## What are the symptoms of Crohn's disease?

When the disease flares up, one or more of the following symptoms may occur:

- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhea
- Weight loss and loss of appetite
- Bleeding from the rectum
- Ulcers in the mouth
- Anemia or a reduction in hemoglobin may result from excessive bleeding.
- Fever and tiredness
- Anal fissures
- Other symptoms
  - Skin rashes
  - Arthritis (joint pain)
  - Inflammation in the eye (uveitis)
  - nflammation of liver
  - In children, growth may be slower than normal children

## How is Crohn's disease diagnosed?

There is no single test to diagnose Crohn's disease. Tests are done to eliminate other causes of the symptoms.

Diagnosis is based on:

- Symptoms like diarrhea, pain and bleeding per rectum
- Blood tests to detect anemia and a high WBC count.
- A stool test to find out if there is bleeding in the stools, or any other pathology.
- Colonoscopy with biopsy to prove Crohn's disease.
- Capsule endoscopy may be advised
- Computerized Tomography (CT) scan and MRI enterography

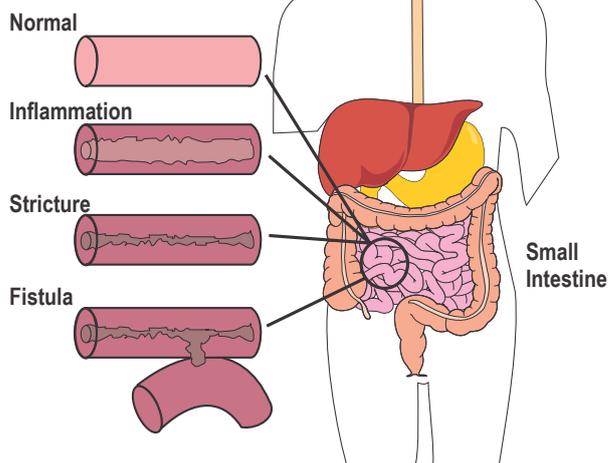
- Upper gastrointestinal (GI) and small bowel barium series

## What are the complications of Crohn's disease?

The complications of Crohn's disease are:

- Intestinal obstruction or blockage due to thickening of bowel wall with swelling or scarring of bowel wall causing stricture.
- Fistulas are abnormal connections which occur when the ulcers in the intestinal walls break down and make a tunnel between the intestine and surrounding organs such as bladder, vagina and skin. They frequently occur in the anus and rectum. Abscesses form when the fistula gets infected.
- Malnutrition can occur if Crohn's disease is not controlled as it blocks absorption of nutrients, vitamins and minerals.

### Complications of Crohn's disease



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## What is the treatment for Crohn's disease?

There is no cure for Crohn's disease. However the goal remains to control the inflammation, relieve symptoms and correct nutritional problems.

**Medications** for Crohn's disease include:

- Aminosalicylates e.g. balsalazide, mesalamine, sulfasalazine
- Corticosteroids
- Immunosuppressants e.g. 6-mercaptopurine, methotrexate, azathioprine, cyclosporine
- Biologicals or anti-TNF blockers e.g. infliximab, adalimumab
- Others
  - Paracetamol for pain
  - Antibiotics to prevent or treat infections and fistulas
  - Loperamide to stop severe diarrhea

### Diet and Nutrition

Dietary modifications are necessary to relieve the symptoms of Crohn's disease. It is necessary to maintain an adequate nutritional and calorie intake as well as vitamins and minerals.

**Surgery** is indicated in the following conditions:

- Intestinal blockage
- Fistulas
- Abscess
- Bleeding
- Failure of medicines

The commonest surgery is removal of the affected segment of the intestine and joining the two ends. At times if the two ends cannot be joined a hole or a stoma is created to drain the intestines.

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