

## **\*What are Crohn's & Colitis?**

Learning that you or your loved one has been diagnosed with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis may fill you with anxiety, concern, and lots of questions. Even many health care professionals are unfamiliar with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. It's important to begin learning all that you can about what Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis is so that you can better understand these conditions and learn how to manage its symptoms.

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are both major categories of Inflammatory Bowel Diseases (IBD). IBD affects an estimated 1.4 million Americans. These chronic diseases tend to run in families and they affect males and females equally. While IBD can affect anyone, Caucasians are more likely than other ethnic groups to have IBD. The diseases are especially prevalent in Jews of European descent (Ashkenazi Jews). African Americans and Hispanics in the United States are increasingly affected.

Crohn's disease is a chronic inflammatory condition of the gastrointestinal tract and may affect any part from the mouth to the anus. Read more about the signs and symptoms of Crohn's disease.

Ulcerative colitis is a chronic inflammatory condition limited to the colon, otherwise known as the large intestine. Read more about the signs and symptoms of ulcerative colitis.

### **Shared Symptoms of Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis**

It is often difficult to diagnose which form of IBD a patient is suffering from because both Crohn's Disease and ulcerative colitis cause similar symptoms.

Symptoms related to inflammation of the GI tract:

- Diarrhea
- Rectal bleeding
- Urgent need to move bowels
- Abdominal cramps and pain
- Sensation of incomplete evacuation
- Constipation (can lead to bowel obstruction)

General symptoms that may also be associated with IBD:

- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Weight Loss
- Fatigue
- Night sweats
- Loss of normal menstrual cycle

Both illnesses do have one strong feature in common. They are marked by an abnormal response by the body's immune system. The immune system is composed of various cells and proteins. Normally, these protect the body from infection. In people with Crohn's disease, however, the immune system reacts inappropriately.

However, in people suffering from IBD, the immune system reacts inappropriately, mistaking benign or beneficial cells and bacteria for harmful

foreign substances. When this happens, your immune system can do harm to your gastrointestinal tract and produce the symptoms of IBD.

\*Courtesy of the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America