Dear Alice,

Do you know anything about the disease Crohn's? If you do, any latest research information?

— Stomach ache

Answer

Dear Stomach ache,

Crohn's disease is a lifelong condition characterized by inflammation of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. Symptoms include persistent diarrhea, painful abdominal cramps, fever, occasional rectal bleeding, mouth sores, and fatigue. Depending on the person, it can develop in varying areas of the GI tract, but it's most common at the end of the small intestine and in the colon, which is part of the large intestine. Crohn's disease most commonly develops in young adults ages 20 to 29, in people who have a family member with Crohn's disease or inflammatory bowel disease, or in people who smoke cigarettes. The causes of Crohn's disease are unclear, but researchers believe it's caused by an interaction of genetic and environmental factors. Ready for more? Keep reading!

There are a number of potential causes associated with Crohn's disease. These can include genetics, an autoimmune response, smoking, use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS), and a high fat diet may all contribute in some way. In order to diagnose Crohn's, it may require a combination of physical and diagnostic tests. During a physical, a health care provider may do tests to examine abdominal functioning. They may also use lab tests or an endoscopy to help make the diagnosis, as well as rule out any other potential conditions that may contribute to any symptoms.

People who have Crohn's disease may experience some additional complications. Common complications include bowel obstruction and ulcers. Sometimes ulcers can lead to fistulas. This is when an ulcer extends through the bowel wall, creating an abnormal passage between two organs, or between an organ and the outside of the body. Malnutrition is another common complication due to poor absorption of nutrients throughout the digestive system.
Though Crohn’s disease doesn’t have a cure yet, medical professionals work closely with patients to both manage symptoms as well as treat complications. Management and treatment plans can involve any combination of medications, nutrition therapy, surgery, and lifestyle and home remedies. Some medications that are commonly used to help control symptoms include: antibiotics, anti-inflammatory, corticosteroids, and immune modifiers, as well as other medications to relieve specific signs and symptoms. During flare-ups, soft, bland foods low in fiber may help minimize or prevent discomfort. While surgery doesn’t cure the disease, removal of damaged portions of the intestine may be performed to provide additional relief or to reduce an obstruction in the bowel.

Although Crohn’s disease requires a specialist’s close supervision, as well as periodic hospitalizations, most people with Crohn’s lead full, active lives. Researchers continue to seek ways to improve the health of those with this disease; recent research and info about support groups can be found at the Crohn’s and Colitis Foundation of America website [2].

Take care,
Alice!

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