

Colitis , Crohn's

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The Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America

Emotional Wellness and IBD

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Although emotional issues may occur before a flare-up of Crohn's or ulcerative colitis, there is no evidence to show that stress, anxiety, or tension is responsible for Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD). No single personality type is more prone to develop psychological or emotional issues than others, and no one "brings on" the disease by poor emotional control. However, Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis can impact both physical and emotional well-being as well as self-esteem. As a result, individuals may have emotional responses that include but are not limited to:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Denial of chronic disease
- Need for dependence, or dependent behaviors
- Feeling stressed or overwhelmed
- Poor self-image

These reactions constitute a response to the disease and not its cause. They may occur at the time of diagnosis, or at any other time during an individual's life.

When these emotional responses interfere with daily functioning, it is important for the patient to work on ways to improve his or her psychological response. Avoiding all stress or negative emotions is impossible, and since high emotions or emotional situations may occur right before a flare, it is important for you to find ways to manage them. Stress reduction techniques can help you to stay calm and maintain perspective. There are numerous strategies and techniques for stress and emotional management, and no one method has been proven to be more effective than another for everyone. Each person needs to find their own healthy balance. Try an approach that appeals to you. If that doesn't work, try another. Here are some stress and emotional management techniques that may be beneficial:

- **Relaxation and breathing exercises**

- Practicing yoga or tai chi
- Light aerobic exercise (walking, swimming etc.)
- Cognitive behavioral therapy or psychotherapy with a psychologist or social worker
- Meditation or hypnotherapy
- Books, recordings, guided imagery, journaling, etc.
- Attending support groups in your local chapter
- Continuing to pursue hobbies and other activities you enjoyed before diagnosis
- Creating a support network of friends, family, and health care professionals
- Medication to address your emotional and mental state

Coping techniques for dealing with the disease itself may take many forms depending on the individual's situation. For example, episodes of diarrhea or abdominal pain may make you fearful of being in public places. But completely avoiding activities outside the home isn't necessary. All it takes is some planning ahead of time to improve your coping. For example, you might want to consider some of the following:

- Be aware of bathroom locations close to your destination
- Carry extra underwear, toilet paper, or moist wipes

Overall, it is important for an individual to understand that they did not cause their disease, and to attempt to approach their new life without guilt or self-blame. It is also important to remember that family, friends, and loved ones may also be suffering emotionally as a result of your diagnosis. These individuals may also benefit from some of the stress management techniques listed above.

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Ulcerative Colitis Health Center

The Link Between Stress and Ulcerative Colitis

Research shows this GI ailment feeds on your tension.

By Charlotte Libov

WebMD Magazine - Feature

Reviewed by Brunilda Nazario, MD

WebMD Feature Archive

Ulcerative colitis can begin very early. At the age of 12, for instance, Amanda Sina Griffith found herself the object of a custody battle -- and was besieged by painful stomach cramps and bloody diarrhea. "I'd had very mild stomach symptoms before; my doctor thought it was a bacterial infection. But now, it was worse," she recalls. The diagnosis was ulcerative colitis.

Now 31, the Norton, Mass., public relations consultant and mother of a 7-month-old still finds that when she's under stress her symptoms flare up. "My system is very sensitive. If I'm under stress, I feel tired, run-down, and crampy in the belly," says Griffith, who worked full time until recently, but reduced her hours when she found job pressures worsened her stomach problems.

Griffith's story sounds familiar to Gerard E. Mullin, MD, director of integrative GI nutrition services at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. While stress doesn't cause ulcerative colitis, research shows it can increase the risk of flare-ups, says Mullin.

Ulcerative Colitis Symptoms

Ulcerative colitis is a disease that affects the large intestine (also known as the colon) and the rectum. Although the causes of ulcerative colitis are unknown, some researchers believe that an autoimmune process may be a factor in the disease. When the body's immune system is oversensitive and attacks its own healthy organs and tissues, disease can occur. Other factors that may contribute to the development of ulcerative colitis include genetics, environmental factors, smoking, and psychological stress.

Symptoms include abdominal pain or cramping, mild fever, rectal bleeding and diarrhea, and, less commonly, fatigue, loss of appetite, weight loss, and anemia. Some people may have joint pain, with redness and swelling, and liver problems.

Ulcerative Colitis Treatment

Treatment of mild to moderate ulcerative colitis usually begins with drugs to relieve inflammation and help prevent flare-ups. If these drugs do not work, doctors can prescribe stronger medications. And while dealing with stress is not a substitute for medication, doing so can help ease the emotional anxiety that often comes with the disease, Mullin says.

"People with these diseases are often more vulnerable to stress. They have an immune system that is overactive to begin with. Their immune system needs to be calmed down," Mullin says.