



Specialty Pharmacy  
Crohn's Disease  
Wellness Guide

**Walmart** 

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## Introduction

Whether you're actively managing a condition or just looking for information, Walmart Specialty Pharmacy is here to support you every step of the way. We're also here to make it easy to get your prescriptions, stay on track with your medication refills, and answer any other questions you may have.

We understand that treatment involves more than just medication. So, we're here to help you understand the lifestyle changes that may make managing your condition easier on a daily basis.

It is always recommended that you talk with your doctor about any changes to treatment plans.

Remember, your health conditions do not define you! It's okay to ask for help.

## What is crohn's disease?

Crohn's disease, an inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), is a lifelong chronic condition that primarily affects the intestines and appears in other parts of the digestive tract.

While ulcerative colitis and crohn's are both inflammatory bowel diseases, ulcerative colitis only affects the colon, whereas crohn's disease is chronic inflammation that can affect the entire gastrointestinal (GI) tract.

Crohn's is an autoimmune disease that causes the body's immune system to attack its healthy tissue. The exact cause is unknown, but factors such as genetics, environment, and smoking tobacco have been noted as risk factors.<sup>1</sup>

Here is what you should know about crohn's disease.

## What causes crohn's disease?

It is not known exactly what causes crohn's disease. However, many factors are believed to contribute to increased risk, including family history, genetic background, and your body's ability to respond to bacteria. The use of tobacco, certain medicines, and a high-fat diet have also been linked to Crohn's disease in some individuals.<sup>1,3</sup>

The disease can happen at any age but most often affects adolescents and adults from age 20 to 30. It affects people from all ethnic backgrounds and is equally likely to affect men and women.<sup>2</sup>

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

Because it is an autoimmune disorder, crohn's disease causes your body to attack and destroy its healthy body tissue. This can cause your digestive system's intestines and other parts to become painfully swollen or inflamed.<sup>1</sup> Symptoms of crohn's disease can be mild or severe; they usually come and go, alternating between flare-ups and remission. Symptoms will also differ from person to person.

When the disease is active, you may experience primary symptoms in the digestive tract or intestinal tract, such as<sup>1,3</sup>

- Diarrhea, which may be bloody
- Cramps and pain in the stomach
- Loss of weight or appetite
- Fever

- Fatigue and exhaustion
- Feeling a need to defecate, even when your bowels are empty

People with severe crohn's disease may also experience secondary symptoms outside of the digestive/intestinal tract, such as

- Anemia
- Redness, soreness, pain, or swelling in the eyes
- Soreness or pain in the joints
- Nausea or loss of appetite
- Mouth ulcers and swollen gums
- Tender, red bumps on or under the skin
- Draining of pus or mucus around the anus

Crohn's disease can also increase your risk of other serious conditions like small bowel cancer, colon cancer, ulcers, and malnutrition.<sup>4</sup>

## What are the types of crohn's disease?

There are five different types of crohn's disease based on what area of the GI tract is affected: ileocolitis, ileitis, gastroduodenal crohn's disease, jejunoleitis, and Crohn's (granulomatous) colitis.

No matter the type of crohn's disease, all require a gastroenterologist to diagnose and create a treatment plan tailored for each person.



## What can you do to treat crohn's disease?

The first step to treating crohn's disease is to receive a proper diagnosis from a qualified physician. No single test exists; your doctor may order a series of tests or procedures to rule out other conditions. This includes blood tests and stool samples to a colonoscopy, endoscopy, enteroscopy, barium enema, CT scan, or MRI.<sup>1,5</sup> Tell your doctor when you are experiencing worsened symptoms such as increased bowel movements, abdominal pain, new or worsening joint pain, or skin issues and how this affects your daily life.

Although there is no cure for crohn's disease, there are treatments that can help ease the symptoms, reduce flares, and increase remission periods. Some patients have even experienced long-term remission with treatment.

For most people, treatment goals are to reduce inflammation by blocking triggers and reducing the risk of complications.<sup>5</sup> Common triggers that can affect flares and remission include smoking, stress, illness, certain foods, or environmental factors.

Common ways to treat crohn's disease include the use of:



**Anti-inflammatory drugs** like corticosteroids or oral 5-aminosalicylates reduce inflammation or induce a period of remission.<sup>5</sup>



**Immune system suppressors** like azathioprine, mercaptopurine and methotrexate. These are drugs that can also reduce inflammation by targeting your immune system.<sup>5</sup>



**Biologics** such as natalizumab, vedolizumab, and infliximab control inflammation by neutralizing proteins in your immune system.<sup>5</sup>



**Antibiotics** to reduce the effects of leakage and discomfort from fistulas and abscesses and sometimes to heal them.<sup>5</sup>



**Over-the-counter (OTC) medications** like mild pain relievers, anti-diarrheal fiber supplements, assorted vitamins, and nutritional supplements.<sup>5</sup>



**Nutrition therapy** involves a special diet recommended by your doctor to help improve gastrointestinal health and reduce inflammation on a short-term basis.<sup>5</sup> A nutritious and balanced diet helps promote general wellness. It is essential to track what foods can trigger flares or worsening symptoms. Visit Walmart Grocery for ingredients for a healthier diet.

**Surgery** is sometimes used to treat severe cases of crohn's disease, but usually only if drugs, lifestyle changes, and other treatments are ineffective. While surgery doesn't cure crohn's disease, it can help temporarily improve the condition by removing damaged or infected areas and draining abscesses.

## Resources & references



**Lifestyle changes** include weight loss, a healthier diet, quitting smoking, drinking less alcohol, learning to manage stress, and joining a support group.<sup>1</sup> If you're interested in lifestyle changes that can help ease symptoms of crohn's disease, talk to your pharmacist or doctor for more information about what health products can be most helpful.



**Quit smoking** tobacco since its use can have a harmful effect on anyone's health, and it can increase your chances of getting other serious conditions like cancer. If you're having trouble stopping on your own, you can find helpful products at Walmart. Ask your pharmacist for recommendations.



**Focus on your mental health** since anxiety and stress can worsen symptoms and lead to depression, making inflammation worse. Talk to your doctor or care provider if you're experiencing depression, anxiety, or other issues.



**Improve your sleep health** since lack of sleep can worsen your symptoms, although we understand it can be hard to sleep when you feel pain or discomfort. A few tips for sleeping better include going to bed at the same time every night and avoiding electronics, caffeine, and alcohol before you go to sleep. Walmart carries many products to assist with sleep. Ask your pharmacist for recommendations.



**Guard against infection** since crohn's disease is an autoimmune disorder. Make sure you're up to date on your immunizations and vaccines. Wash your hands frequently and avoid close contact with people who may be sick.



**Get support** since crohn's disease can be challenging to your physical, mental, and emotional health, and those closest to you are likely to be affected, too. Involve your family in your treatment plan if possible.



- **The Crohn's and Colitis Foundation** helps patients, clinicians, and experts alike, offering basic information and resources, local support, scientific research, legislative guidance, and much more: <https://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/>
- **The support group finder** from the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation can help you locate one of the hundreds of local support groups across the United States: <https://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/find-a-support-group>
- **Medline Plus** from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) offers a collection of helpful information for those diagnosed with Crohn's disease, including sections for women and children, as well as a tool to find local specialists: <https://medlineplus.gov/crohnsdisease.html>
- **The Mayo Clinic** also offers a wide variety of information and advice for those with Crohn's disease: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/crohns-disease/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20353309>
- **WebMD** has many resources for people with Crohn's disease, including helpful tips, a guide to online communities, and videos: <https://www.webmd.com/ibd-crohns-disease/crohns-disease/crohns-disease-resources>
- **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** offers a list of resources that ranges from basic information for patients to clinical research for caregivers: <https://www.cdc.gov/ibd/resources.htm>

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2. Crohn's & Colitis Foundation. "Overview of Crohn's Disease." CrohnsColitisFoundation.org: <https://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/what-is-crohns-disease>
3. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). "Symptoms & Causes of Crohn's Disease." Nih.gov, Sep 2017: <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/digestive-diseases/crohns-disease/symptoms-causes>
4. The Cleveland Clinic. "Crohn's Disease." My.ClevelandClinic.org, 28 May 2020: <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9357-crohns-disease>
5. The Mayo Clinic. "Crohn's disease: Diagnosis & treatment." MayoClinic.org, 13 Oct, 2020: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/crohns-disease/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20353309>

We're here to help!  
For a list of participating pharmacy locations visit  
**<https://www.walmart.com/aispoc>**

