



Specialty Pharmacy

# Ulcerative Colitis Wellness Guide

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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 ulcerative colitis?

Ulcerative colitis is an inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) that affects the large intestine (which is also called the colon). Ulcerative colitis inflames the colon's lining and leads to painful sores and ulcers. People with ulcerative colitis frequently experience diarrhea, stomach pain, and the urgent need to have a bowel movement, even when the bowels are empty.<sup>1</sup>

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.

## What causes ulcerative colitis?

The precise cause of ulcerative colitis is not known. A number of different factors are believed to increase a person's risk of developing the disease. These include:<sup>3</sup>

- **Genetic makeup** - family history of ulcerative colitis increases one's risk.
- **Immune system abnormalities** - can cause inflammation in the colon.
- **Microbiomes** - like bacteria, viruses, and fungi in your digestive tract.
- **External factors** - like food intake and environmental conditions.

Your diet may also contribute to your risk of ulcerative colitis. Research has shown that adults with a low level of fiber intake in their diet are more likely to have IBD, as are women with a higher intake of sugar-sweetened beverages and total added sugar.<sup>4</sup>

Ulcerative colitis can appear at any age. However, it most frequently develops in teenagers and young adults. It also affects men and women equally.<sup>5</sup>

About half of all people diagnosed with ulcerative colitis have only mild symptoms. More severe cases are usually treated in a hospital. Surgery is used to treat as many as one in three people with ulcerative colitis.<sup>1,6</sup>

# What are the symptoms, & types of ulcerative colitis?

The symptoms of ulcerative colitis—and how severe they are—will differ from person to person. Whether the condition is mild, severe, or somewhere in between, most people will experience periods of flare-ups and remission. The remissions can last weeks, months, or even years.<sup>3</sup>

The most common symptoms of ulcerative colitis include:<sup>3,5</sup>

- Diarrhea or loose stool
- Stomach pain and cramping/bloating (a sense of pressure in the bowels)
- Urgent need to use the restroom
- Rectal bleeding
- Passing blood, mucus, or pus with stool

If the condition is particularly severe or spread out to a large area, other symptoms may also appear. These include vomiting, nausea, weight loss, fatigue, fever, and experiencing as many as 10 bloody bowel movements per day.<sup>3</sup>

Ulcerative colitis can sometimes cause symptoms in other parts of the body outside of your digestive system. These can include swollen joints, mouth sores, kidney stones, skin rashes, and red, itchy eyes.<sup>5</sup>

The specific symptoms each person might experience will also depend on the type of ulcerative colitis they're diagnosed with. The different types include:<sup>5</sup>

- **Pancolitis**, which affects the entire colon.
- **Ulcerative proctitis**, which only inflames the rectum, and is usually milder form of the disease.
- **Proctosigmoiditis**, affects the rectum and sigmoid colon (the part of the colon that connects to the rectum).
- **Left-sided colitis**, where inflammation begins at the rectum and continues farther up into the large intestinal tract.

Research has shown that having ulcerative colitis can also put you at higher risk of other health conditions like cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory disease, arthritis, kidney or liver disease, and osteoporosis.<sup>4,5</sup>



## What can you do to treat ulcerative colitis?

While there is no complete cure for ulcerative colitis, several treatment options are available to help relieve symptoms and to bring about periods of remission. Make sure to track your symptoms and talk to your doctor to adjust your treatment as needed. Tell your doctor when you are experiencing new or worsened symptoms. Depending on the type and severity of your condition, your doctor may recommend one or more of the following methods:



**Prescription medicines** may help with symptoms like stomach pain, bleeding, and diarrhea. They work by reducing inflammation to allow healing. They may also help bring about and sustain remissions. Frequently prescribed medications for ulcerative colitis include antibiotics, aminosaliclates, corticosteroids (a.k.a. steroids), immunosuppressants, and biologics.<sup>1,3</sup>



**Surgery** may be recommended if your symptoms are particularly severe, if they don't improve with medication, or if another condition complicates them. Up to a third of people with ulcerative colitis are treated with surgery.<sup>1,3</sup>



**Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines** like acetaminophen can treat mild pain or diarrhea. People with ulcerative colitis are advised to avoid nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), which can make symptoms recur or get worse.<sup>3</sup>



**Vitamin supplements** like vitamin D and calcium may help prevent or slow down the loss of bone mass.<sup>3</sup>



**Self-care & lifestyle choices** can help reduce flare-ups and help prevent the condition from getting worse. A wide variety of options are available for self-care, including healthy eating, exercise, yoga and meditation, and drinking less alcohol.



**Diet & nutrition** are not believed to cause ulcerative colitis, but certain foods have been found to worsen symptoms for some people. People are often advised to keep a careful watch of their diet to avoid foods that can cause flare-ups.<sup>1</sup> Talk to your doctor about what foods may be best for you—Walmart Grocery offers a large variety of healthy choices.



**Stop smoking** since tobacco can have a harmful effect on anyone's health. 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 ulcerative colitis is painful and sometimes unpredictable and can have a huge effect on your day-to-day well-being. Talk to your doctor or care provider if you feel that you're experiencing depression, anxiety, or other issues.



**Improve your sleep habits** because the lack of sleep can make symptoms worse. Simple tips that can help your sleep patterns are going to bed at the same time every night and avoiding electronics, caffeine, and alcohol before bedtime. Walmart carries many products to assist with sleep. Ask your pharmacist for recommendations.



**Guard against infection** since ulcerative colitis 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** from your family and friends. Loved ones of people with ulcerative colitis are often critical to treatment—but they're not always included as much as they could be. Involve your family in your treatment plan if possible.

## Resources

- **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 find a support group that's close to you: <https://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/find-a-support-group>
- **The American College of Gastroenterology** has an **Ulcerative Colitis Guidebook & Video** to help you better understand the condition, how you can treat it, and what resources are available to help you along the way: <https://gi.org/topics/acg-ulcerative-colitis-guidebook-and-video/>
- **Medline Plus** from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) offers a collection of useful information for those diagnosed with Crohn's disease, including sections for women and children and a tool to find local specialists: <https://medlineplus.gov/ulcerativecolitis.html>
- **The National Institutes of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK)** has a collection of information on ulcerative colitis that includes a rundown of symptoms, causes, and recommendations for patients: <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/digestive-diseases/ulcerative-colitis>
- **The Great Bowel Movement** is a community-based website that gives people with IBD a chance to share their stories and to get inspired by the stories of others: <https://thegreatbowelmovement.org/>

## References

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We're here to help!  
For a list of participating pharmacy locations visit  
[\*\*www.walmart.com/spoc\*\*](http://www.walmart.com/spoc)

