



Ulcerative Colitis

What is ulcerative colitis?

Ulcerative colitis is an ongoing inflammation in the lining of the large intestine and rectum. The disease is characterized by remissions (periods of disappearance of the disease) and flareups over many years.

How does it occur?

The cause of ulcerative colitis is unknown. The disease sometimes appears to be associated with stress and certain skin rashes. Complications arising from ulcerative colitis include joint pain and abnormalities of the bile ducts.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include:

- Bloody diarrhea and dehydration
- Cramps in your lower abdomen
- Tenderness in your abdomen
- Fever
- Weight loss.

How is it diagnosed?

The doctor will ask about your symptoms and examine you and may order various lab tests. The doctor may want you to have a rectal biopsy, barium enema, sigmoidoscopy, or colonoscopy (looking inside your large intestine with a flexible lighted tube).

How is it treated?

Treatment for mild and moderate cases may include hospitalization, depending on your condition. The doctor may advise a special diet high in protein and calories and low in fiber. You may be given enemas or suppositories at night and oral medication to reduce inflammation.



RSim General & Colorectal Surgery
1 Farrer Park Station Road,
#13-10, Farrer Park Medical Centre,
Singapore 217562.
Tel: (65) 6636 3493 Fax: (65)6636 3494

If your condition is more serious, hospital treatment may include:

- ✓ intravenous feeding (into a vein) to replace lost nutrients and fluids
- ✓ blood transfusions to restore lost blood
- ✓ use of medications such as antibiotics and steroids to reduce inflammation
- ✓ nasogastric suction (through a tube passed through the nose to the stomach) to drain out acidic digestive juices.
- ✓

Surgery may be required. Usually this means total removal of the large intestine, followed by an operation called a permanent ileostomy. The ileum (the lower part of the small intestine) is brought through a cut in the abdominal wall and formed into an opening to allow the stool to collect in a bag attached to the skin.

How long will the effects last?

Attacks of colitis may come and go over many years. Complete and permanent cure with medication alone is unusual. Ulcerative colitis can usually be controlled with proper treatment, but surgery is often necessary for a cure.

How can I take care of myself?

Follow the treatment plan your doctor prescribes, and ask for home care recommendations. For diarrhea, rest your bowel by drinking only clear liquids such as water, juice, tea, and bouillon. It is important to drink often so you don't get dehydrated. Suck on ice chips if you feel too nauseated to drink anything. Do not eat solid foods because they can cause cramps.

Because chronic ulcerative colitis may be associated with cancer of the intestine, regular checkups with your doctor are important.

For more information you may also want to write or call:



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Singapore 217562.
Tel: (65) 6636 3493 Fax: (65)6636 3494

Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America

444 Park Avenue South

New York, New York 10016

Phone: (212) 685-3440

How can I prevent ulcerative colitis from recurring?

- Eat regular meals high in protein and calories and low in fiber. Avoid milk products if they give you indigestion.
- Take sitz baths (a "seat" bath, in which only the hips and buttocks are immersed in water) to relieve discomfort.
- Learn to use deep breathing exercises and other relaxation techniques when you feel stress.
- Rest and sleep regularly.
- Learn to recognize the signs of recurrence.

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