



## Ulcerative Colitis

Ulcerative colitis (UC) is a long-term condition that primarily affects the large intestine, or colon. It is characterized by inflammation and the formation of ulcers in the colon's lining, leading to a range of symptoms that can significantly impact an individual's quality of life. This condition is part of a group of diseases known as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), including Crohn's disease.

### Understanding Ulcerative Colitis and Inflammatory Bowel Disease

UC and Crohn's disease, while both under the umbrella of IBD, have distinct differences. They primarily differ in the areas of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract they affect. UC is confined to the colon, whereas Crohn's disease can affect any part of the GI tract, from the mouth to the anus. This distinction is crucial as it influences the symptoms experienced by the patient and the approach to treatment.

### Causes and Risk Factors

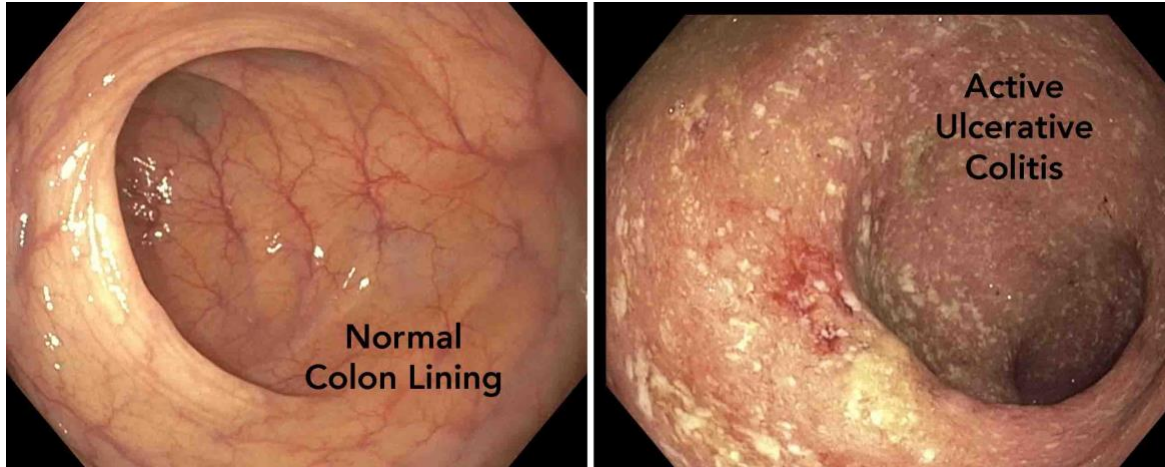
The exact cause of UC remains a mystery to medical science. However, current understanding suggests that it likely involves a combination of factors. An abnormal response by the body's immune system is one such factor. Instead of attacking harmful viruses or bacteria, the immune system mistakenly targets cells in the colon's lining, causing inflammation and ulcers.

Genetics also plays a role, as UC runs in families. If a close relative has the condition, your chances of developing it are higher. The gut microbiome, the community of bacteria and other microbes living in our intestines, is another factor under investigation. An imbalance in these microbes may contribute to inflammation and disease.

Environmental factors, such as diet and exposure to pollution or certain medications, may also play a role. UC can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity, but it is most commonly diagnosed in individuals in their mid-30s.

### Types of Ulcerative Colitis

UC is not a one-size-fits-all condition. It presents in different forms, affecting other parts of the colon and rectum. These include **Ulcerative Proctitis**, which affects only the rectum; **Left-Sided Colitis**, which impacts the rectum and the left side of the colon; and **Total Colitis**, which affects the entire colon. Each type presents different symptoms and may require additional treatment approaches.



### Symptoms and Diagnosis

The symptoms of UC can vary widely from person to person. Common ones include loose and urgent bowel movements, bloody stool, abdominal cramps and pain, and persistent diarrhea accompanied by abdominal pain and blood in the stool. These symptoms can range from mild to severe, and they can come and go with periods of remission in between.

Diagnosing UC involves a comprehensive process that includes a physical exam, a review of medical history, and a series of medical tests. These tests may include blood tests to check for anemia or infection, stool tests to rule out other disorders like infections or parasites, and a colonoscopy to visually inspect the colon and rectum. Imaging tests such as CT scans or MRIs may also provide a detailed view of the colon and surrounding organs.

### Treatment and Management

Treatment for UC aims to reduce inflammation, manage symptoms, and improve the patient's quality of life. This can include medication, changes in diet and nutrition, and, in some cases, surgical procedures. Medicines for treating UC include anti-inflammatory drugs, immune system suppressors, and biologics. These drugs work to reduce inflammation in the colon and promote healing.

Dietary changes can also help manage symptoms. While there is no one-size-fits-all diet for UC, specific modifications, such as a high-calorie diet, a lactose-free diet, or a low-fat diet, may help reduce symptoms during a flare-up.

Surgery may be recommended in severe cases when medication and lifestyle changes are not enough. This can involve removing the entire colon and rectum, a procedure known as a proctocolectomy. Following this surgery, a method to create a new pathway for waste to leave the body is necessary. This can be an ileostomy, where the small intestine is connected to a small opening in the abdomen, or an ileoanal anastomosis, where the small intestine is connected to the anus.

## Living with Ulcerative Colitis

Living with UC can be challenging, but with the proper treatment and support, most people with the condition lead full and active lives. Working closely with your healthcare team to find a treatment plan that works best for you is essential. Regular check-ups, medication management, and lifestyle changes, including stress management and regular exercise, can all contribute to better disease management and improved quality of life. More information can be obtained at the [Crohn's & Colitis Foundation](#).

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### **Center For Digestive Health & Nutrition**

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The Center for Digestive Health & Nutrition is a private medical practice comprised of experienced Gastroenterologists, Nurse Practitioners, and staff members dedicated to preventing and treating digestive disorders. Our physicians have been serving the needs of those in Western Pennsylvania and surrounding areas since 1977, having cared for tens of thousands of individuals with digestive problems. Our mission is to deliver high-quality gastroenterology services efficiently and cost-consciously. We realize the very sensitive nature of GI illness and understand the necessity to provide our services in an environment that stresses patient privacy and confidentiality and where patient satisfaction is the goal. Appointments can be conveniently scheduled online via our website above. Learn more about digestive issues on Instagram [@thedigestivetract](#)

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