

Services Provided:

- Individual therapy
- Group therapy
- Pre-surgical evaluations
- Psychological evaluations

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COLORADO HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

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Crohn's Disease www.cdfa.org

Crohn's disease is an autoimmune disease that causes inflammation in the digestive tract. Crohn's disease usually occurs in the small intestine, but it can affect any part of the digestive tract, from mouth to anus. The inflammation extends deep into the lining of the affected area. The most common symptoms of Crohn's disease are abdominal pain, often in the lower right area, and diarrhea. Rectal bleeding, weight loss and fever may also occur.

Body and mind are interrelated in numerous and complex ways. It has been observed that in

times of physical or emotional stress, patients may experience flare-ups of symptoms, such as increasing abdominal pain or diarrhea. This relates to changes in the physiologic functioning of the gastrointestinal tract, and decreased resistance to inflammation, rather to increased inflammation. It has now been shown (www.cdfa.org) that severe chronic stress can lead to increased inflammation. These effects, however, should be carefully separated from the primary cause of Crohn's disease, which is not emotionally based. The symptoms of many diseases, even

those with no known biologic cause, can get worse in stressful situations.

Some patients will find it difficult to cope with a diagnosis of Crohn's disease. It can pose a threat to their health-related quality of life, including their physical and emotional well-being, their social functioning, and even their self-concepts.

This is the eleventh of our monthly CHP newsletters. Please feel free to email us with topic requests, questions, etc. for future issues.

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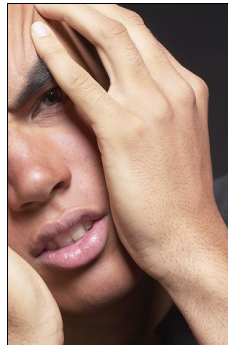
Emotional Impact of Ileostomy Surgery www.cdfa.org

Surgery is recommended for Crohn's patients when the disease cannot be controlled by medication. Some patients unable to be helped by medical treatment or standard resections of the bowel may have to undergo an ileostomy. People with ostomies must wear a pouch on their abdomen, into which wastes are emptied. This form of surgery poses some additional problems of adjustment. Most patients, however, can more easily cope with the problems with the help of informed and infor-

mative physicians. Organizations such as the United Ostomy Association (36 Executive Park, Suite 120, Irvine, CA 92714; www.uoa.org) and the J-pouch support group (www.j-pouch.org) can be very helpful resources. The national and local ostomy associations address these questions in their numerous publications, meetings, and Web sites, and can provide helpful counsel for the surgery patient both during the pre-operative stage and after surgery. This counsel

can usually be provided through an extensive in-hospital and home visitation program.

One of the major concerns of people who face ostomy surgery is whether they will be able to enjoy a healthy sex life. Experience has shown that sexual activity improves, rather than worsens, especially in people who were acutely ill before surgery. Psychotherapy can provide additional support as people address various issues that come along with ileostomy surgery, including body image, confidence, self-concept, sexual concerns, depression, and anxiety.



Crohn's Disease Statistics

- Crohn's disease affects men and women equally (www.nih.gov)
- About 20% of people with Crohn's disease have a blood relative with some form of inflammatory bowel disease, most often a brother or sister and sometimes a parent or child (www.nih.gov)
- American Jews of European descent are four to five times more likely to develop Crohn's disease than the general population (www.cdfa.org)
- The prevalence rate of Caucasians with Crohn's disease is 149 per 100,000 (www.cdfa.org)
- The prevalence rates among Hispanics and Asians are lower than those of African Americans and Caucasians (www.cdfa.org)
- Several studies (Duclos et al., 1990; Sorensen et al., 1987) found that 20% of patients with Crohn's disease were unable to work due to Crohn's-related symptoms
- Diagnosis can happen at any age, though it is most common between ages 15 and 35 (www.cdfa.org)
- Crohn's disease is more prevalent in people from Scandinavian countries, Great Britain, and North America (Sandler, 1994)
- There are an estimated one million people in the United States with Crohn's disease (CCFA, 2000)
- Approximately 2/3 of patients with Crohn's disease undergo surgery at some time during their lives (Sachar, 1997)
- Some researchers (Robertson, Jay, Diamond, & Edwards, 1989; Drossman, 1995) have suggested that as Crohn's disease activity increases, both physiological and psychological functioning deteriorate.
- People who smoke are far more likely to develop Crohn's disease. Continuing to smoke after diagnosis also can make treatment less effective or worsen the illness (www.mayoclinic.com)
- Having Crohn's disease increases the chance of developing colon cancer. Despite this risk, more than 90% of people with Crohn's disease never develop colon cancer (www.mayoclinic.com)



Emotional Factors and Coping www.cdfa.org

Because body and mind are so closely interrelated, emotional stress can influence the course of Crohn's disease. There is no evidence to show that stress, anxiety, or tension is responsible for Crohn's disease. No single personality type is more prone to develop Crohn's than others, and no one "brings on" the disease by poor emotional control.

It is much more likely that the emotional distress that patients sometimes feel is a reaction to the symptoms of the disease. Many chronic illnesses seem to pose a threat to patient's



entire quality of life—their physical and emotional well-being, social functioning, and sense of self-esteem. People with Crohn's disease should receive understanding and emotional support from their families and physicians. Some patients are helped considerably by speaking with a therapist who is knowledgeable about Crohn's disease or chronic illness in general.

Coping techniques for dealing with Crohn's disease may take many forms. Attacks of diarrhea, pain, or gas may make people fearful of being in public places. Some practical advance

planning may help alleviate this fear. Finding out where restrooms are ahead of time and/or carrying extra clothing can be helpful for many people. Travel plans should always include a large enough supply of medications, its generic name in case it is run out of or lost, and names of physicians in the area the patient will be visiting.

People with Crohn's disease accept the diagnosis with a wide range of emotions. Some people are angry for a time. Others are relieved at finally knowing what it is that has made them ill. Approaching the disease in a straightforward manner may maximize the patient's ability to be part of the health care decisions from the start, yet everyone is different. Each person must adjust to living with the disease in his or her own way.