

Overview

Crohn disease is a condition that affects the digestive tract. The cause of Crohn disease is unknown. The most common symptoms of Crohn disease include diarrhea, abdominal pain, weight loss, and fever. Some people with Crohn disease also have problems outside of the digestive tract, including a skin rash, joint pain, eye redness, and, less commonly, liver problems.

There is no cure for Crohn disease, but there are medicines that can help to keep the disease under control. If medicine does not control symptoms, surgery might be an option to remove the diseased part of the intestines.

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of Crohn disease involve the digestive tract and include:

- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue
- Unintentional weight loss
- Anal pain

Some people get other symptoms and related disorders as well, including:

•Mouth sores – Mouth sores (called "aphthous stomatitis") can develop during flares of Crohn disease. They are usually found between the gums and lower lip, or along the sides or underside of the tongue.

Mouth sores are often painful. The medicines used to treat the digestive tract usually help to treat mouth sores as well.

•Arthritis – Arthritis or joint inflammation can occur in people with Crohn disease. It usually affects the larger joints, and is most active when the bowel symptoms are active.

•Eye inflammation – Inflammation of the eyes (called uveitis or scleritis) occurs in up to 5 percent of people with Crohn disease. These problems can affect one or both eyes. Symptoms of uveitis include "floaters" in the vision, eye pain, blurred vision, and sensitivity to light. Scleritis can cause burning or itching of the affected eye. Treatment usually includes eye drops.

•Anal problems – Crohn disease can cause problems in the area around the anus. The most common problems include fissures (tears), ulcers, fistulas (a tunnel between the intestine and other organs), infected areas of skin, and stenosis (narrowing of the anus). These problems may occur alone or in combination.

Treatment

There are a number of medicines used to treat Crohn disease. The "best" medicine will depend on several factors, including your age, which part of your intestine is affected, if your disease is severe, and the presence of other medical conditions you may have. The following is a summary of commonly used medications.

Steroids — Steroids, or glucocorticoids, include prednisone and budesonide. These medicines are usually used for a limited time to get inflammation under control, and are then gradually stopped. Steroids are not recommended long-term because of the side effects.

5-aminosalicylates and sulfasalazine — The 5-aminosalicylates (abbreviated 5-ASA) and sulfasalazine are a group of medicines that reduce inflammation in the last part of the small intestine (ileum) and colon. 5-ASA medicines are used to treat ulcerative colitis (another type of inflammatory bowel disease), but in some cases can be used for treating Crohn disease, in particular sulfasalazine.

Immunomodulators — Immunomodulators help to reduce the inflammation associated with Crohn disease. Immunomodulators might be recommended if you have severe symptoms or do not improve with steroids, or if your symptoms worsen after decreasing your steroid dose. The most commonly used immunomodulators include azathioprine, 6-mercaptopurine, and methotrexate.

Biologic response modifiers — Biologic response modifiers are a class of therapies that work by preventing inflammation. These therapies are often used in combination with treatments described above.