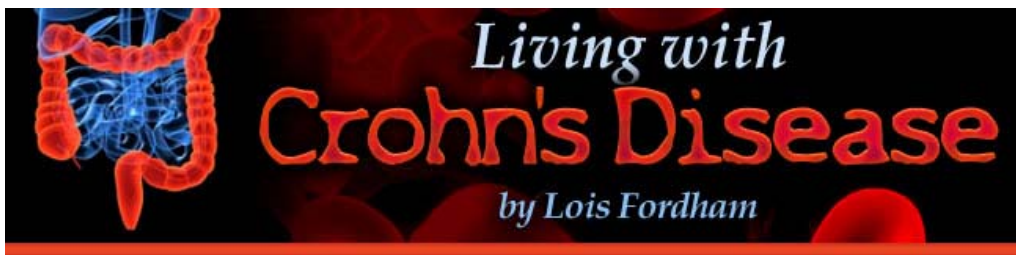


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# Living with Crohn's Disease

By Lois Fordham

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## **About the Author**

Lois Fordham is the pen-name of a person whose life has been affected by Crohn’s Disease.

She has enjoyed writing fiction with some success for several years and never thought of writing non-fiction.

But she found that people who had this condition or whose immediate families included sufferers were often unable to discuss their situation or get answers to common questions about the disease.

Lois hopes that her ebook, though only an informed lay-person’s opinion, will help people that have or care for those with Crohn’s Disease.

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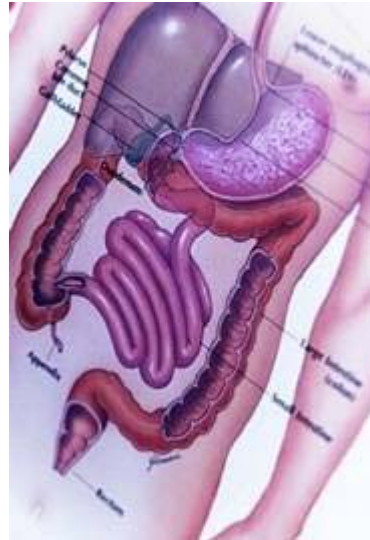
## Part-I: Introduction

### Crohn’s Disease - An Overview

Crohn’s disease is an inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract.

It is a type of bowel disease, although it can erupt anywhere between the mouth and the anus. Crohn’s disease affects the digestive system of the body. However, most incidences of the disease manifest in the lower part of the small intestine or the early part of the large intestine.

There can be perfectly normal parts of the bowel between severely affected parts.



Crohn’s disease normally affects people between the ages of fifteen and thirty years with some instances among people in their sixties and seventies. It does not affect young children.

This disease affects around 400,000 and 600,000 people in North America. Estimates suggest that around 27 to 48 people in every 100,000 are affected by Crohn’s disease in Northern Europe. The incidence of Crohn’s disease is higher in women than in men. This is not an infectious disease.

Crohn’s disease gets its name from an American gastroenterologist surgeon, Burrill Bernard Crohn. Crohn, with two of his colleagues, described the disease in 1932. Together, they explained the presence of the disease in specific patients with inflammation of terminal ileum. A Polish surgeon, Antoni Lesniowski, had also described the disease as early as 1904.



There is no specific cause of Crohn’s disease. It could have a genetic cause. Siblings and relatives of people with Crohn’s disease have a higher than average chance of suffering from the disease at some time.

Most gastroenterologists are of the opinion that Crohn’s disease could be due to overreaction of the body’s immune system to any specific virus or bacteria. Once you develop Crohn’s disease, it becomes your lifelong companion, although with periods of remission.

Doctors hint at various environmental factors and dietary habits that could be the main cause for Crohn’s disease. Smoking is an inherent risk factor. Other than that, foods rich in sugar, fats, and refined products could cause this disease. High intake of shellfish with low intake of fruits, potassium, water, magnesium and vitamin C-rich products could encourage Crohn’s disease. Regular intake of oral contraceptives might also be a factor with this disease.

Common symptoms of Crohn’s disease includes abdominal pain, diarrhea, weight loss, loss of appetite, rectal bleeding and, in some cases, fever.

Additionally, it causes mouth ulcers, eye inflammation, joint pains, and inflammation or ulcer-like eruptions on the skin.

In severe cases, Crohn’s disease could cause inflammation of neighboring body parts like the other bowels, vagina or bladder. It could also cause infections of the urinary tract. Sometimes, it causes bowel cancer.

Crohn’s disease could also cause osteoporosis, arthritis, and a thinning of bones leading to bone fractures.

Perianal discomfort with itchiness and inflammation around the anus is common. Fecal incontinence with twenty to thirty bouts of fecal discharge, sometimes even in the middle of night, is common with Crohn’s disease. Teenagers developing this disease could exhibit retarded growth.

Symptoms of Crohn’s disease are very similar to those of ulcerative colitis. Both diseases cause inflammation of the bowels. However, a clear distinction in the diagnosis of the disease is essential to decide a definite pattern of treatment.

Doctors can diagnose the presence of Crohn’s disease after studies of various tests. These tests include blood tests, stool tests, X-rays, gastroscopy, colonoscopy, CT, ultrasound, and MRI scans.

There is no single cure for Crohn’s disease. You can take drugs or medications, undergo surgery, and follow a specific dietary routine to combat the disease. All medications and surgeries can only reduce the effects of this disease. Nothing can completely clear your system of Crohn’s disease at this time.

However, it is possible to live a full life with Crohn’s disease. It does not cripple you in any way. You can continue with the normal routines of your life. You only need to follow a strict diet regimen and take regular medications. There can be flare-ups of Crohn’s disease. Since these are most unpredictable, it is best to stay within reach of medical help.

## **Part-II: Understanding Crohn’s Disease**

### **What is Crohn’s Disease?**

Crohn’s disease is a specific disorder of the digestive tract. It affects the gastrointestinal tract. Although Crohn’s disease can affect any part of the intestine, it mostly affects the ileum or the lower part of the small intestine. Inflammation causes swelling of the ileum which, in turn, causes immense pain and discomfort.

You feel increasing intensity and frequency to empty your intestines. This causes a diarrhea-like situation. This disease is the same as enteritis or ileitis.

Inflammation of the bowel can occur at any age. However, this mostly starts in the teens and extends into adulthood. Crohn’s disease can lead to various other diseases like colon cancer, arthritis, kidney stones, gallstones and skin ailments like eruptions and eczemas.

#### ***What Happens with Inflammation of The Bowels?***

Crohn’s disease can affect any part of the bowel, although it primarily affects the lower part of the small intestine and the upper part of the large intestine. Inflammation causes the formation of various muscular layers in-between.

Additionally, this inflammation causes swelling of the mesentery, a fan-shaped tissue containing lymph glands and intestinal blood vessels. The mesentery connects the small intestine to the back abdominal wall. It may cause total dysfunction of the intestinal tract.

Inflammation of the intestine causes redness and swelling of the small intestine. It also disrupts functioning of the small intestine immensely. The disease may not affect the entire small intestine. There could be some good patches. Other parts of the intestine could appear as pits. These pits are Crohn’s disease. It has caused tissues to shed in this region.

Inflammation can also occur at the mouth, stomach, or esophagus. The affected areas are regional enteritis while normal areas are skip areas.

### ***Effects of Crohn’s Disease***

Crohn’s disease symptoms keep coming and going. There are periods of intense symptoms while sometimes you may not feel any symptoms at all.

There is no permanent cure for Crohn’s disease at this time.

The disease causes irritation of the inner walls of the intestine. This, in turn, causes cracks, ulcers and fissures. Inflammation could also cause formation of abscesses.

In between attacks, the intestine tries to rebuild tissues damaged due to the disease. Such healing could be in the form of a new lining. Sometimes during the healing process, the intestine is unable to distinguish between the inside and outside of different parts of the intestine. This could lead to the formation of lining across ulcer edges. This is called a fistula. This causes an irregular connection between different parts of the intestine. This could lead to further complications.

Crohn’s disease is primarily due to inappropriate reactions of the immune system. The body’s immune system mistakes the bacteria

for foreign substances and turns hostile towards them. Therefore, white blood cells attack the intestine walls and causes chronic inflammation. This causes bowel dysfunction, inflammation and all the misery associated with Crohn’s disease.

## Who Named Crohn's Disease?

Crohn’s disease is an inflammatory disease of the small intestine.

The disease started as a disease of the terminal ileum. The very first reported case of the disease dates from the time of Giovanni Battista Morgagni, between 1682 and 1771. The patient died due to severe colic pains. The next reported cases of this colon disease were by John Berg in Stockholm in 1898 and by Antoni Lesniowsky from Warsaw in 1904. Again, in 1913, Scottish physician T. Kennedy Dalziel, reported thickening of the patients’ small intestine in around nine cases.

Subsequently, American clinician and pathologist Eli Moschowitz and A. O. Wilensky of the Mount Sinai Hospital published a work, “Nonspecific granulomata of the intestine”, in 1923. This paper discussed thickening of the distal ileum. On May 13, 1932, Burrill Bernard Crohn, Gordon Oppenheimer, and Leon Ginzburg gave a lecture on, “Terminal ileitis: A new clinical entity” at a meeting of the American Medical Association in New Orleans. This discussion reported fourteen cases of inflammation of the distal ileum.

However, since all patients were alive, the name was changed to “Regional ileitis - a pathologic and clinical entity”. Publication of this article in a medical journal caused widespread attention. Although Oppenheimer and Ginsburg were more experienced, Crohn’s name appeared first on the publication due to alphabetical reasons. Therefore, the name of the disease also stayed as Crohn’s disease.

## What Causes Crohn's Disease?

There is no specific and proven cause for Crohn’s disease. There are several theories indicating possible causes of Crohn’s disease. The most popular among them is adverse reactions by the body's immune system. Your body's immune system consists of various body cells containing various proteins. These cells help fight off infections and harmful elements from your body.

Scientists claim that your body's immune system for some unknown reason recognizes bacteria, food, and similar substances in your intestine and digestive system as foreign. It therefore attacks these foreign particles. Such attacks cause white blood cells to form a lining on the intestine walls. This leads to chronic inflammation and resultant bleeding, ruptures, and ulcers. These injure your bowels extensively.

Some scientists claim such functioning of immune system as the result of Crohn’s disease within your system. Therefore, there is no clear evidence if your immune system is the cause or result of Crohn’s disease.

Nevertheless, the majority of scientists are of the opinion that such mysterious functioning of your body's immune system causes Crohn’s disease in your intestines.

In normal and healthy intestines, there are specific bacteria, enteric microflora. There are around a billion and a trillion such bacteria in every gram of intestinal content. These help digestion and prevent abnormal bacteria coming in through water and food to invade the intestines.

If by any chance abnormal bacteria thrive within your intestines, your immune system does not attack them at once. Instead, it has a certain level of tolerance. However, such tolerance level is absent in persons affected by Crohn’s disease. Therefore, it causes inflammatory damage to intestinal cells.

### ***Other Factors***

Among other possible factors for the cause of Crohn’s disease are environmental factors and the genetic history of the patient. In many cases, genetic build-up could be the cause for Crohn’s disease.

Of course, there is no simple relation for this disease to pass on to offspring from parents. Yet, the disease could manifest in families. This is especially true in cases of intermarriage between close relations. As for instance, Crohn’s disease has a high-level of incidence in Jewish families of Eastern Europe.

There are disputes regarding inheritance of Crohn’s disease. In more than eighty percent of people having Crohn’s disease, there is no incidence of any of their close relatives having any ulcerative colitis or similar disease.

Crohn’s disease is common and prevalent among the industrialized sections of society in western countries. Therefore, scientists are of the view that specific environmental factors and features coupled with diet patterns of such societies could be behind the occurrence of this disease in large numbers among members of the society.

Your body’s immune system produces a protein, anti-tumor necrosis factor. This could cause inflammation as present in Crohn’s disease. Yet, there is no clear evidence to prove this fact.



## Signs and Symptoms of Crohn’s Disease

Crohn’s disease affects more than a million Americans. There are various signs and symptoms of this disease. Different people report different symptoms. Nevertheless, the most common symptom is loose bowel movements with blood.

### ***Signs and Symptoms of Crohn’s Disease***

**Abdominal pain:** Most suffer from severe abdominal pain, specifically in the lower right area. This is the position of the ileum within your intestine. Many confuse Crohn’s disease for appendicitis in the initial days due to such pain. Pain could range from severe to unbearable. It could be a steady pain or occur after meals. Sometimes, it could start while eating. Pain could occur in bouts while doing physical exercises like jogging.

**Diarrhea:** Diarrhea could range from mild loose motions to severe and uncontrollable loose motions. Sometimes, fecal discharge could have blood or mucus with it. Sometimes, it could be a tendency to go to toilet but without passing anything. However, if your Crohn’s disease is concentrated only in the small intestine, you may not suffer from diarrhea.

**Weight Loss and Malnutrition:** If Crohn’s disease affects the major part of your intestines, your body cannot absorb any nutrients from your food intake. This causes sudden and huge weight loss. In children, it manifests as malnutrition. This is due to the absence of essential vitamins and nutrients. It also causes stunted growth and delayed development of body tissues and mental health.

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