

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)

What is IBD?

The term *inflammatory bowel disease*, or IBD, refers to both ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. Ulcerative colitis affects the colon (the large intestine). Crohn's disease can involve any part of the intestine, from the mouth to the anus. Both diseases cause inflammation inside the intestine, but they may also cause serious problems in other parts of the body.

The most common symptoms of IBD are diarrhea (which may be bloody), abdominal pain, fever, fatigue, and weight loss. Other problems linked to IBD in some patients include mouth sores, arthritis, and problems with the liver, skin, kidneys, and eyes.

How will my health care provider know I have IBD?

First, your health care provider will ask you questions about your symptoms. If she thinks you may have IBD, she'll order some of these tests:

- **Blood testing.** Your blood will be checked for a low hemoglobin level, which happens when you have bloody diarrhea.
- **Fecal occult blood test.** This test checks for traces of blood in your stool. Before this test, you should avoid eating certain foods, such as red meat or other food that's red. Your health care provider will give you a special container and instructions for collecting one or more stool samples for testing.
- **Colonoscopy exam and biopsy.** Using a tubelike device called an endoscope, your health care provider will examine your large intestine for signs of disease and take tissue samples. She inserts the endoscope into your rectum and moves it up into your intestine. Before the exam, you'll take medicine to empty your intestine. You'll also receive medicine to keep you comfortable during this test, which lasts 30 to 60 minutes.
- **Barium enema X-ray.** You'll also take medicine to empty your intestine before this test. You'll receive an enema of barium (a fluid), which will fill up your intestine. When your intestine is X-rayed, the barium will help show any damage. This test lasts 30 to 60 minutes.

How will my IBD be treated?

Based on what your health care provider learns from the tests, she'll probably prescribe medicine to make you feel better and control your IBD (see *How Does My IBD Medicine Help Me?*).

Because IBD may cause weight loss, your health care provider may want you to take a special supplement or follow a diet that's high in calories and protein. Follow her advice so you get plenty of protein, vitamins, and minerals.

If medicine doesn't reduce your symptoms and control your IBD, your health care provider may advise you to have surgery to remove damaged parts of your intestine.

What can I do to relieve my symptoms?

To keep your symptoms under control, follow these guidelines.

- **Take your medicine** in exactly the way your health care provider tells you. Don't suddenly stop taking it without first talking with her. If you miss a dose, ask her what to do.
- **Keep appointments with your health care provider.** She needs to see you regularly to make sure your medicine is helping you. Depending on the medicine you're taking, she may also need to check your blood regularly to make sure you're taking the right dose of medicine. She may also recommend other types of checkups, such as an eye exam.
- **Keep tabs on your symptoms.** It's possible for your symptoms to return even though you're taking your medicine. If your symptoms don't improve or if they worsen, tell your health care provider.
- **Stay alert for new symptoms.** Contact your health care provider if your joints become painful or stiff, if you get a rash or red or purple marks on your body, if your eyes become red and your vision gets blurry, or if you notice anything else that concerns you.

How does my IBD medicine help me?

Find your IBD medicine below, then look across the table to find out what it does and things you should watch for. Tell your health care provider if your IBD symptoms get worse. If you have unpleasant side effects from your medicine, don't suddenly stop taking it. Instead, call your health care provider so she can change your treatment.

Drug type/Examples	What it does	Things to look out for
5-aminosalicylates		
balsalazide (Colazal) mesalamine (Asacol, Pentasa, Rowasa, Canasa) olsalazine (Dipentum) sulfasalazine (Azulfidine)	Reduces intestinal inflammation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These drugs may cause abdominal pain or cramping, blood problems, diarrhea, fatigue, hair loss, and headache. Sulfasalazine may cause orange-colored urine (harmless), sensitivity to light, and a rash. In men, sulfasalazine can cause problems with sperm that make it difficult for them to impregnate a woman. • Use sunscreen and wear a hat and long-sleeved clothing to protect your skin when you're outdoors. • Get routine blood tests, as directed by your health care provider, to check for possible blood problems. • You may notice a whole mesalamine tablet in your stool. This is harmless, but tell your health care provider if it keeps happening.
Corticosteroids		
budesonide (Entocort EC) methylprednisolone (Medrol) prednisone	Reduces inflammation throughout your body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These drugs may cause acne, increased appetite, mood swings, upset stomach, and weight gain, even if you're taking them for only a short time. • Take each dose with food to prevent stomach upset. • Don't stop taking this medicine suddenly, which could be fatal. Wear a medical-alert tag indicating that you take this medicine. • Because long-term use of this medicine can cause serious side effects, keep all appointments with your health care provider so she can monitor your health. • Because your body may have trouble fighting infection when you take this medicine, notify your health care provider if you have a fever, sore throat, or any other sign of infection.
Immune modulating drugs		
methotrexate mercaptopurine (Purinethol) azathioprine (Imuran)	Reduces inflammation throughout your body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These drugs may cause diarrhea, joint pain, hair loss, infection, rash, nausea, and vomiting. • Check with your health care provider before receiving routine vaccinations. • Because some of these medicines can cause birth defects, use birth control if you're a sexually active woman, and talk with your health care provider before becoming pregnant or breast-feeding. • Get routine blood tests, as directed by your health care provider, to check for possible blood and liver problems. • Because your body may have trouble fighting infection when you take this medicine, notify your health care provider if you have a fever, sore throat, or any other sign of infection.
Biological response modifier		
infliximab (Remicade)	Reduces inflammation throughout your body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have tuberculosis, this medicine can make it worse. Your health care provider will give you a skin test for tuberculosis before you start taking this medicine. • You'll receive this medicine through an I.V. line. If you have chest pain, itching, a rash, or any other problems after you receive it, tell your health care provider right away. • If you have an infection, you may not be able to take this medicine until the infection is gone. • Because your body may have trouble fighting infection when you take this medicine, notify your health care provider if you have a fever, sore throat, or any other sign of infection.

• *Stay informed.* Your health care provider can recommend books and other sources of information on IBD, such as the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation

of America (<http://www.cffa.org>). She can also tell you about support groups in your area to help you cope with the disease.🗣️

This patient-education guide has been adapted for the 5th-grade level using the Flesch-Kincaid and SMOG formulas. It may be photocopied for clinical use or adapted to meet your facility's requirements. Selected references are available upon request. For more tips on writing education guides, see the first article in this series: "Writing Easy-to-Read Teaching Aids" (March 2002).

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