



## What are the symptoms of IBD?

The symptoms of Inflammatory Bowel Disease are varied and the onset of the illness may be quite sudden or develop slowly over time.

**Diarrhoea.** Diarrhoea in IBD is different from the diarrhoea associated with more common conditions such as gastroenteritis (viral or bacterial infection) or food poisoning which most people have experienced at some time or another, or the diarrhoea that may occur with irritable bowel syndrome. The diarrhoea in IBD lasts for weeks or months at a time, often waxing and waning with good, alternating with bad, days. The diarrhoea may occur with a severe urge making reaching a toilet in time impossible (incontinence). The stool may contain blood, mucus or pus. Diarrhoea that regularly wakes you from sleep may be another sign of IBD.

**Cramping pains in the abdomen.** These can be very severe and often occur after meals or before passing a stool.

**Tiredness and fatigue.** This can be due to the illness itself, from anaemia (lack of blood) or from a lack of sleep if your sleep is disturbed by pain or diarrhoea.

**Fever.** A low grade fever can be a sign of IBD.

**Loss of appetite and loss of weight.** Weight loss can be due to the body not absorbing nutrients from the food you eat because of the inflammation in the gut.

**Mouth ulcers.** Frequent and non-healing mouth ulcers.

## Some people with IBD, particularly Crohn's, may develop complications, including:

**Stricture.** This is when there is inflammation followed by healing in the gut or bowel which can cause scar tissue to form. Scarring results in narrowing of the bowel, called a stricture. A stricture may make the eating of poorly digested foods e.g. popcorn, tough meat or fibrous vegetables painful or may cause a complete blockage or bowel obstruction when nothing will pass through the gut. This is a medical emergency.

**Fistulas.** These are more common in people with Crohn's Disease. A fistula is an abnormal channel or passageway caused when Crohn's disease "burrows" through the lining of the intestine or colon. Fistulas typically occur around the anus in Crohn's disease (peri-anal fistula) causing a painful lump or abscess which may discharge mucus, pus or stool. Fistulas may also exit on the skin (entero-cutaneous fistula) or connect one loop of intestine with another (internal fistula).

**Primary Sclerosing Cholangitis or PSC:** This rare IBD complication more commonly associated with ulcerative colitis. In this condition inflammation and scarring affects the bile ducts in the liver. Bile ducts are a network of drainage tubes which join together to form the main bile duct. This allows bile from the liver to drain into the intestine in order to aid digestion. Scarring of the bile ducts in PSC may be silent and only identified when a liver blood test is checked or may cause symptoms such as jaundice and skin itching.

**IBD can sometimes affect other parts of the body. These are called extra-intestinal manifestations of IBD and may occur before the onset of gut symptoms of IBD. The most common ones include:**

**Anaemia and iron deficiency:** Anaemia and low iron levels are extremely common in patients with both active IBD and IBD in remission and cause a variety of symptoms such as fatigue, poor concentration, low mood and restless legs at night.

**Painful Joints.** Inflammation of the joints, often known as arthritis, means that fluid collects in the joint space causing painful swelling. It usually affects the large joints of the arms and legs, including the elbows, wrists, knees and ankles.

**Lower back pain.** IBD can be associated with inflammation of the lower back and pelvis called ankylosing spondylitis. This condition causes lower back pain and stiffness.

**Eye inflammation.** The most common eye condition affecting people with IBD is episcleritis, which affects the layer of tissue covering the sclera, the white outer coating of the eye, making it red, sore and inflamed.

**Skin problems.** A number of skin problems are associated with IBD and include painful red bumps on the lower legs (erythema nodosum) and painful skin ulcers (pyoderma gangrenosum) are the most common skin disorders associated with IBD.

**IBD can affect many other parts of the body depending on the type of IBD, whether the IBD is flaring or in remission, whether they have required surgery, patient's age and the treatment they have been using. Some of these include**

- Deep vein thrombosis or DVT
- Osteoporosis or weakening of the bones
- Poor growth in children and adolescents
- Hair loss also known as telogen effluvium
- Gallstones
- Kidney stones
- Vitamin deficiencies
- Other autoimmune conditions e.g. psoriasis, alopecia, thyroid problems,