



## Managing Side Effects in Crohn's Disease Care

There are many treatment options to help keep Crohn's disease in remission. Treatment options vary from person to person and depend on the severity of symptoms. As with any condition, it's important to take your medication just like your doctor tells you so you receive the maximum benefits of treatment. However, this can be challenging if you experience side effects. To help make sure you can continue treatment, share any side effects that occur with your doctor or pharmacist right away.

The following are some common side effects of Crohn's disease treatment and how to best manage them.



### Malnutrition

Malnutrition is when the body does not receive the nutrients it needs to function properly. This is common with people who have Crohn's disease. It is due to symptoms of the condition and some medications.

- ▶ Avoid foods that seem to worsen symptoms. Common examples include bulky grains, spicy foods, alcohol and milk products.
- ▶ Eat foods rich in protein, vitamins, calcium, iron and zinc.
- ▶ Keep a food journal. It can help you track which foods worsen your symptoms
- ▶ Eat often. This will help you get the calories you need to maintain proper health.
- ▶ Talk to your doctor or dietitian about developing a healthy eating plan that will give you the nutrients you need.
- ▶ Take small bites and chew food completely before swallowing.

## Nausea, Vomiting and Dehydration

Nausea and vomiting are common symptoms of Crohn's disease as well as common side effects associated with its treatment. Mild nausea and vomiting can be uncomfortable but do not normally lead to serious problems. Persistent vomiting however, can lead to more serious problems, like dehydration, malnutrition and weight loss.

- ▶ Drink and eat slowly.
- ▶ Drink plenty of fluids.
- ▶ Drink peppermint, chamomile or ginger tea.
- ▶ Allow time to rest after eating to help with digestion.
- ▶ Eat foods at room temperature.
- ▶ Avoid foods or food odors that may make you nauseous.
- ▶ Avoid greasy, fried or spicy foods

## Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is when the bones become weak and have an increased risk of breaking. Crohn's disease can increase your risk for developing osteoporosis due to some medications used in treatment as well as issues with absorption created by the disease. Your weight, inactivity, smoking and other medications are factors that can worsen bone thinning. To improve bone health, ask your doctor about medications that may prevent bone loss.

- ▶ Eat a healthy diet high in calcium and vitamin D.
- ▶ Include weight-bearing exercises in your workout routine. This includes yoga, tai chi or brisk walking.
- ▶ Limit how much alcohol you drink.
- ▶ Don't smoke. Smoking can speed up bone loss.



## Increased Risk of Infection

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One of the side effects associated with Crohn's treatment is the increased risk of infection. This risk can also be a side effect of surgery, which is sometimes used to treat moderate to severe cases. If you think you have an infection, contact your doctor. Symptoms of an infection include:

- Fever
- Chills or sweats
- Sore throat
- Shortness of breath
- Stuffy nose
- Upset stomach
- New onset of pain
- Sores that don't heal
- Redness, soreness or swelling in any area

## Diarrhea

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Many people with Crohn's disease experience diarrhea. This is also a common side effect of the disease itself and some medications used to treat Crohn's disease. Diarrhea many times each day can lead to weakness and dehydration. If diarrhea lasts more than two days or you are dehydrated, contact your doctor.

- ▶ Drink plenty of fluids without caffeine (water, sports drinks, etc.).
- ▶ Eat small meals of soft, bland, low fiber foods - bananas, white bread, rice, noodles or chicken.
- ▶ Avoid spicy or fatty foods.
- ▶ Avoid dairy or high sugar foods.
- ▶ Avoid high fiber foods - beans, whole grain breads and cereals, nuts, raw vegetables or fruits.

## Headaches

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Depending on your medication, you may experience headaches. Not all headaches are the same and can vary in severity. Be sure to tell your doctor about your headaches and how they feel. This helps your doctor decide if your headaches are a medication side effect or possibly another health issue.

- ▶ Ask your doctor if you can take over-the-counter painkillers.
- ▶ Try to get enough sleep each night.
- ▶ Place an ice pack where you have the most intense pain for 15-20 minutes at a time.
- ▶ Drink plenty of water and limit caffeine.
- ▶ Eat a healthy diet and exercise often.
- ▶ Try yoga or meditation.

## Headache Continued...

- ▶ If you get a headache, keep the lights dim and avoid loud noises and strong smells. Rest and try to relax until the headache goes away.
- ▶ Seek medical attention if these tips don't relieve your headache, if the headache is severe or if you have other symptoms along with your headache (vision changes, numbness, confusion or trouble speaking).

## Mouth Sores

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Medications used to treat Crohn's disease can produce mouth sores and other oral problems. These sores may or may not be painful and come and go. Oral flare-ups do not always occur at the same time as intestinal flare-ups and they are more commonly seen in children and men with Crohn's disease. If you are impacted by mouth sores speak with your physician about treatment options.

## Abdominal Pain

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Abdominal pain is a common side effect of medications used to treat Crohn's disease. This pain is also a common symptom of the disease itself. Mild Crohn's disease typically causes some discomfort, but in more severe cases, the pain can be intense.

- ▶ Ask your doctor if you can take over-the-counter painkillers.
- ▶ Ask your doctor about meditation or massage therapy.
- ▶ Always tell your doctor if you have pain or if it gets worse.

## Joint Pain

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Joint pain and inflammation is one of the most common side effects of Crohn's disease treatment. This can cause pain in the joints of hands, wrists and knees. As your other Crohn's disease symptoms improve, joint pain should subside.

- ▶ Get plenty of rest.
  - ▶ Try gentle exercise, like swimming, biking and walking.
  - ▶ Maintain a healthy weight to take any extra pressure off your joints.
  - ▶ Wear supportive footwear.
  - ▶ Take a warm bath.
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## Kidney Problems

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Kidney problems, including kidney stones, are often a side effect of Crohn's disease. Some medications used for Crohn's disease can also cause problems with your kidneys. If a kidney stone is small, there may be no symptoms. For larger stones, symptoms can include:

- Sudden and intense pain in the lower back, side, groin or abdomen. There may also be nausea, vomiting or fever.
- Pink, red or brown urine.
- Painful or frequent urination.

If you think you have a kidney stone, contact your doctor right away. You should also talk to your doctor about your increased risk of developing kidney stones.

- ▶ Drink plenty of water.
- ▶ Avoid carbonated and acidic beverages. Also avoid drinks with citrus, caffeine or high amounts of sugar. Drink water, teas and clear fruit juices instead.
- ▶ Eat a healthy diet.

## Eye Problems

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Eye problems, such as glaucoma and cataracts, can be a potential side effect of Crohn's disease medications. If you are having problems with your eyes, be sure to tell your doctor. Common eye problems include:

- Blurred vision
  - Eye redness and sensitivity to light
  - Eye pain and tenderness
  - Burning and itching eyes
  - Vision loss
  - Appearance of a halo around lights
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- ▶ Eat a healthy diet high in omega-3 fatty acids, zinc and vitamins A, E and C. Examples of foods with these nutrients include salmon, tuna, mackerel, boiled eggs, smooth nut butters, green tea, cooked green leafy vegetables and carrots.
  - ▶ Visit your eye doctor often to make sure you aren't developing any eye problems.
  - ▶ Make sure your glasses or contacts prescription is up to date.
  - ▶ Wear sunglasses when outdoors.

## Rash

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Rashes are common with Crohn's disease therapy. Medications that are injected may cause injection site reactions. These include pain, bruising, rash, redness, swelling or itching.

Local injection site pain or reactions can be easily treated by using over-the-counter (OTC) pain relievers or an antihistamine for itching at least 30 minutes before injection.

*Rash Continued...*

Following the injection apply a cold compress to avoid/decrease local redness and swelling. Please ask your physician which OTC pain reliever and antihistamine will be best for you. If you have signs of an allergic reaction, which can include trouble breathing, extreme itchiness, redness or hives, seek medical attention right away.

If you do have a rash, don't scratch the skin. This helps prevent infection. Call your doctor right away if you have any of the following symptoms. Signs of a skin infection include:

- Increased pain and redness
  - Swelling
  - Fever or chills
  - Red streaks in the infected area
  - Discharge of pus
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- ▶ Drink plenty of water.
  - ▶ Apply moisturizer immediately after a shower or bath.
  - ▶ Avoid showers or baths that are too hot.
  - ▶ Take an oatmeal bath (add one cup of oatmeal to bath).
  - ▶ Apply cold packs wrapped in a towel to itchy areas.
  - ▶ Wear loose fitting clothes.
  - ▶ Protect your skin from the sun with clothing or sunblock.



# FAQs

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## ***What is Crohn's disease?***

Crohn's disease is an inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). With Crohn's disease, the body's immune system will attack healthy tissue leading to long-term inflammation of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. This often affects the last part of the small intestine (ileum) and the colon, but can affect different areas of the GI tract for different people

## ***What are the symptoms of Crohn's disease?***

The symptoms of Crohn's disease vary from person to person but common symptoms include:

- Frequent diarrhea
- Stomach pain and cramping
- Rectal bleeding and bloody stools
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Weight loss
- Not wanting to eat
- Mouth Sores

Other symptoms that can occur outside of the GI tract include:

- Joint pain and swelling
- Skin disorders
- Eye inflammation
- Gallstones
- Kidney stones
- Liver problems
- Delayed growth and development in children

## ***What causes Crohn's disease?***

The exact cause of Crohn's disease is unknown. However, several factors have been linked to increased risk of having the disease. This includes a family history of Crohn's disease, your environment and issues with your immune system. Crohn's disease often affects people of eastern European descent between the ages of 15-30.

## ***What treatments are available?***

There is no cure for Crohn's disease but there are many treatment options that help relieve symptoms. The goal of treatment is to bring symptoms under control, reduce flare-ups and ultimately achieve remission. Treatments vary, so talk to your doctor to see which options are best for you.

## ***Common Side Effects of Medications:***

- Increased risk of infection
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Injection site reaction
- Rash
- Headache

## ***How do I manage these side effects?***

Medication can affect everyone differently. Amber Specialty Pharmacy works with patients to help manage any side effects that occur. Discuss any side effects that you experience with your pharmacist or doctor early.

## ***Should I change my diet?***

Avoiding certain foods can help reduce some of the symptoms of Crohn's disease. You also need to make sure you're getting proper nutrition since Crohn's disease can make it hard for your body to absorb nutrients.

Make sure you ask your doctor or dietitian before taking any supplements or changing your diet.

## ***Does Crohn's disease have other complications?***

The complications of Crohn's disease can vary from person to person.

Possible Complications:

- **Fistulas.** Fistulas are ulcers that tunnel through the affected area into nearby tissue.
- **Abscesses.** If a fistula tunnels into the abdominal cavity and causes an infection, an abscess may result.
- **Malnutrition.** Vomiting, diarrhea, steroid use, appetite loss and a lack of nutrients can lead to malnutrition.
- **Colon cancer.** Inflammation in the colon can increase the risk of colon cancer.
- **Bowel obstruction.** Over time, Crohn's disease can cause the intestinal walls to thicken. This can result in narrowed passageways which can block the flow of digested food.



## Amber Specialty Pharmacy is here to help.

We offer guidance and support through our dedicated team of healthcare experts. From the beginning, we help you with the enrollment process and review your insurance coverage. We explore financial assistance opportunities to help you lower your medication costs whenever possible. Our pharmacists review your prescriptions with you - including how to take your medication and manage any side effects. Pharmacists are available 24/7 to assist you when you have questions. Our Registered Nurse and Registered Dietitian offer personalized consultations to assist you with any medically-based questions and nutritional care. We stay in touch with you regularly to remind you when it is time to refill your prescriptions. We are always here to help.

### Additional Resources:

American Gastroenterological Association - [gastro.org](http://gastro.org)

Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America - [ccfa.org](http://ccfa.org)

Mayo Clinic - [mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions](http://mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions)

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases - [niddk.nih.gov](http://niddk.nih.gov)

United Ostomy Associations of America - [ostomy.org](http://ostomy.org)

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