



Campaigning
For Equality

Women's Equality Women's Health – Crohn's Disease



An advice leaflet
for Usdaw Members



What is Crohn's Disease?

Crohn's Disease is a chronic inflammatory condition affecting the bowel. It can affect any part of the digestive tract and includes some or all layers of the gut, causing deep ulceration.

Crohn's Disease is not infectious. There is no permanent cure, but with appropriate treatment it is possible to achieve long periods of remission.

The cause or causes have not yet been identified. Both genetic factors and environmental triggers such as diet and infection are likely to be involved.

Crohn's Disease affects at least 155,000 people in the UK. The most common age of diagnosis is between 16 and 30. Crohn's Disease affects slightly more women than men. People with Crohn's Disease will have special health concerns which need to be understood by colleagues and employers, especially at workplaces with sickness absence policies.

This leaflet is designed to raise awareness of Crohn's Disease and the impact it has.

What are the symptoms?

The main symptoms of Crohn's Disease are:

- Pain in the abdomen.
- Urgent diarrhoea.
- General tiredness.
- Loss of weight.
- It is sometimes associated with other inflammatory conditions affecting the joints, skin and eyes.
- Attacks can be made worse by stress.

The severity of symptoms fluctuates unpredictably over time. Patients are likely to experience flare-ups in between intervals of remission or reduced symptoms

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Why is Crohn's Disease a particular issue for women?

The number of new cases of Crohn's Disease diagnosed in younger women has been increasing over the past few decades.

Women still do most of the caring in our society and many are caring for dependants with Crohn's Disease.

What is the treatment?

Treatment may include drugs, changes in diet, surgery, or a combination of all three.

The goal is to control inflammation, correct nutritional deficiencies and relieve symptoms such as abdominal pain and rectal bleeding.

Treatment for Crohn's Disease depends on its location and severity and should be discussed with your GP or hospital doctor.

What can we do to help people with Crohn's Disease?

- Speak to the person with Crohn's Disease. One of the keys to coping with Crohn's Disease is being able to talk about what the person is going through.
- Learn as much as you can about the disease – from books, the internet and from local and national support groups.
- Remember that some people may be entitled to protection under the disability discrimination provisions of the Equality Act. Someone with Crohn's Disease may have the right to have their work arrangements adjusted to accommodate their condition. See the Usdaw leaflet Representing Disabled Members for more information about how the law might help.
- Union reps can play an active role in supporting members with Crohn's Disease, for example by introducing a system for immediate cover during toilet breaks.
- Raise public awareness. More public toilets are needed, but the Crohn's Society provides a 'Can't wait card' for sufferers which gives them access to toilets in public places. The Crohn's Society also publishes a monthly newsletter on the condition for its members.

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The impact of Crohn's Disease

Crohn's Disease has a big impact on someone's family and on their work and social life. It can also have financial implications.

- The unpredictability of the condition can mean that those with Crohn's Disease may need more time off work. This can cause problems with employers, especially where sickness absence policies are in place. Members should be encouraged to be open and honest about their condition with their employer in order for them to be supported and for adjustments to be made where necessary.
- Some jobs could pose particular problems. Checkout workers for instance might need regular or sudden trips to the toilet. An understanding manager can make all the difference in these circumstances.
- Unlike those with some other long-term illness, people with Crohn's Disease do not automatically qualify for free prescriptions.
- Many people with Crohn's Disease find it difficult getting insurance cover. They are often required to pay higher premiums or have special conditions applied to them.
- The condition puts restrictions on family and social life. Life has to be organised around the condition, eg special diet, medication and toilet facilities.

Useful Contacts

National Association for Colitis and Crohn's Disease (NACC)

45 Grosvenor Road
St Albans AL1 3AW

Tel (information): 0300 222 5700

Tel (for support): 0121 737 9931

email: Info@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk

web: www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk

Core, The Charity for Digestive Disorders Foundation

3 St Andrews Place
London NW1 4LB

Tel: 020 7486 0341

email: info@corecharity.org.uk

web: <http://www.corecharity.org.uk>



Usdaw contacts

To find out more about the work of the Divisional Equalities Forums and Usdaw's equality work or about joining Usdaw contact:

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Cardiff Office
Tel: 029 2073 1131
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www.usdaw.org.uk/equalities

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