BMJ Best Practice

Living with Crohn's disease

Crohn's disease can be a frustrating illness. Some of the time you may feel fine, and other times you may feel as though you can't do much at all.

Over time you'll probably get better at listening to your body and working out what you can and can't do on a particular day.

We've talked to doctors and to people who have Crohn's. Here, we look at some of the ideas they had about living with the condition.

- It's worth taking some time to **find out about Crohn's disease**. Research suggests that people who got more information tended to feel less anxious. Knowing more about Crohn's can help you recognise the times when you need to see a doctor.

  Being aware of the different medications that may help is also useful. For example, you can ask your doctor about switching medicines if you're getting **side effects** from your treatment.

- Talking to your doctor is a good first step for learning more about Crohn's. The internet is another useful source of information, although it's worth looking at who wrote the information on a particular website, to make sure it's reliable.

  Other people with Crohn's can help by offering information and support. You may want to find a **support group** in your area, or look for forums or chat rooms online.

- Some people with Crohn's find that the food they eat doesn't affect their symptoms much. For others, particular foods can cause problems. For example, if you have a narrow section in your bowel, foods that have lots of fibre may lead to a blockage, while some people with Crohn's need more fibre.

  You can ask your doctor to refer you to a **dietitian**. A dietitian can help you adjust your diet while still getting all the nutrients you need to stay healthy.

- If you **smoke**, this can be especially harmful if you have Crohn's disease, as it can mean that you get symptoms more often. Also, surgery for Crohn's is less successful in people who smoke. If you want to stop smoking, there are treatments that can help. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Living with Crohn's disease

- It's important to pay attention to how you're feeling. Crohn's disease doesn't happen because of stress, but people who are especially depressed or anxious seem to get worse symptoms. And if you're feeling stressed, this may make it harder to cope with your illness.

  Your doctor can provide advice and recommend treatments if you're feeling **stressed, anxious, or depressed**.

- Talk to your doctor about day-to-day medicines for treating symptoms like stomach pain or cramps. For example, antispasmodic drugs can help with cramps. If you get pain, many doctors recommend paracetamol.

  You can get stronger painkillers on prescription. But you should avoid painkillers called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) - ibuprofen is one of the most common. These drugs can irritate your stomach, which may make the symptoms of Crohn's worse.

What did you think about this patient information guide?

Complete the online survey or scan the QR code to help us to ensure our content is of the highest quality and relevant for patients. The survey is anonymous and will take around 5 minutes to complete.

BMJ Group