

# Ulcerative Colitis

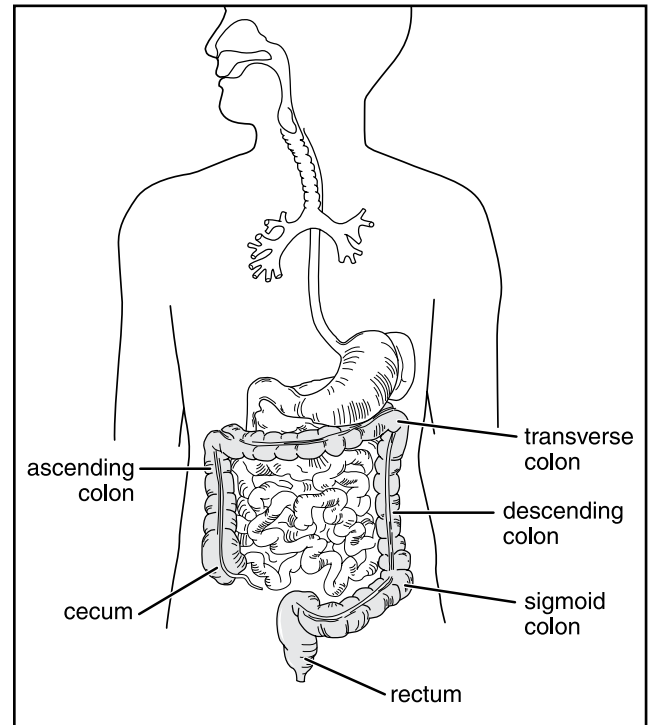
## General Information

Ulcerative colitis causes ulcers and swelling of the inner lining of the colon and rectum. It is one of a group of chronic (long-lasting) disorders that causes inflammation or ulcers in the small and large intestines. Together, these disorders are known as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

Ulcerative colitis most often causes the inner lining of the large intestine (colon or bowel) and rectum to become inflamed. The inflammation usually begins in the rectum and lower (sigmoid) intestine and can spread to the entire colon.

Ulcerative colitis rarely affects the small intestine (except for the lower section, or ileum). The swelling causes the colon to empty a lot, resulting in diarrhea. Cells on the surface of the colon lining die and slough off. This causes ulcers (tiny open sores) to form, cause pus and mucous, and bleeding.

Ulcerative colitis can cause symptoms similar to other conditions, such as irritable bowel syndrome. The correct disorder may take some time to diagnose. It occurs most often in people ages 15 to 40. This disorder is chronic and can reoccur at any time in your life. It is possible to go years between symptoms. There is no way to predict when the symptoms will reappear.



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**The digestive system.**

## Symptoms of Ulcerative Colitis

The following symptoms of ulcerative colitis include:

- abdominal pain/cramping
- bloody diarrhea
- fatigue
- weight loss
- loss of appetite
- rectal bleeding/pain
- urgency (sudden feeling that you need to have a bowel movement right away)
- loss of body fluids and nutrients.

**(over)**

Serious bleeding can lead to anemia (low red blood cell count). Some people can have skin lesions, joint pain, eye inflammation or liver problems. The connection between these symptoms and ulcerative colitis is unknown. These disorders usually go away when the ulcerative colitis is treated.

## **Causes of Ulcerative Colitis**

The exact cause of ulcerative colitis is unknown. It may be caused by your body's reaction to a virus or bacterium. Ulcerative colitis equally affects men and women. It appears to run in families.

## **How to Diagnose Ulcerative Colitis**

If you have the symptoms of ulcerative colitis, your health care provider will take your medical history and give you a physical exam. This exam will include blood tests to see if you have low number of red blood cells (anemia) or high number of white blood cells (swelling or infection). A stool sample can show if you have blood loss or if the symptoms are caused by bacteria or a parasite.

Your health care provider may use an endoscope (flexible tube) to look inside your rectum and colon. During the exam, a tissue sample (biopsy) may be taken from the lining of your colon. Your health care provider will look at this sample under a microscope.

Your health care provider may also want to take a barium X-ray of your colon. For this, barium (a thick, chalky liquid) will be given to you through a tube placed in your rectum. The barium allows growths and other abnormalities show up on the X-ray.

If your health care provider confirms ulcerative colitis, you may need medical care for a long time. Your health care provider will likely want to test you on a regular basis.

## **Treatment**

There is no cure for ulcerative colitis (except surgery to have your colon removed, if possible), but there are many medicines to help control it. Treatment often includes making diet changes, controlling swelling and relieving abdominal pain and diarrhea. Your health care provider will talk with you about medicines and possible side effects.

Although there is no special diet to prevent or treat ulcerative colitis, there are some foods such as highly seasoned foods, raw fruits and vegetables, and milk sugar, or lactose that can make symptoms worse. Eat a well-balanced diet and avoid foods that make your symptoms worse.

Although stress doesn't cause ulcerative colitis, it may add to flare ups and make symptoms worse. Try to reduce stress through regular exercise, yoga, massage or meditation. Try deep breathing and any activity you find relaxing.

If you have ulcerative colitis, you are at greater risk for colon cancer. The risk may be as high as 32 times the normal rate if your entire colon is involved. If only your rectum and lower colon are involved, the risk of cancer is no higher than normal.

If you need your colon removed, your doctor will talk with you about the different types of surgeries, the advantages and disadvantages.

**Information adapted from the  
National Institute of Diabetes and  
Digestive and Kidney Diseases.**