

Crohn's and Colitis Student Initiative:
What does it mean to have Crohn's or Colitis?

To whom it may concern,

I have been diagnosed with Crohn's disease/ulcerative colitis. You are probably asking yourself, so what does that mean? As a student with this chronic autoimmune disease, I will tell you what is it and how it affects my daily life and my role as a student.

1. What is it?

Colitis is when there is inflammation in the large intestine. Crohn's disease is inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract and can occur anywhere within the digestive tract. They are both caused by a combination of a person's immune system, genetic background, and the bacteria of the gut.

2. What does chronic mean?

Having a chronic disease means it is long lasting and will affect me for the rest of my life. While it is a persistent disease, I will feel waves of varying discomfort from time to time. Some days are better than others, but there is no way to predict how I will feel from day to day.

3. What does it feel like to have this disease?

Everyone experiences their diagnosis differently. For some patients, having this disease does not affect their daily lives. For others, it may mean going to the bathroom as many as 10-15 times a day. No two patients are identical in their symptoms, but many people experience cramping, diarrhea, abdominal pain, vomiting/nausea. In addition, other non-stomach related issues can occur such as joint pain and arthritis.

4. Is there a cure? Or a pill to stop the symptoms?

There is currently no cure to either Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis. However, many different treatment types exist, ranging from taking two pills a day to getting injections of strong medication. The treatments try to reduce inflammation in the digestive tract, but are not always 100% effective. Some have side effects and sometimes stress and diet can interfere with the medication's efficacy.

5. Can I still be a good student?

Absolutely. Having this disease does not affect my mental capabilities. However, in times of high stress, for example midterms and finals, symptoms tend to aggravate and feelings of discomfort, pain and the intense need to go to the bathroom may interfere with study time. In addition, during an exam, I may need to leave the room to use the bathroom.

If you find that you have further questions, doctors at the University of Michigan Health System would be more than happy to answer them. You can also visit their web-page at:

<http://www.med.umich.edu/ibd/index.htm>

Sincerely,
Crohn's or Colitis Student