Ulcerative Colitis

Ulcerative colitis is a bowel disease where the inner lining of the colon, also known as the large intestine, becomes irritated or inflamed. The inflammation usually starts in the lower part of the colon, and spreads up the large intestine. The inflammation affects the cells on the lining of the colon. When these cells die, tiny sores or ulcers form on the inner lining of the colon.

**Signs**

A person with ulcerative colitis may have some or all of these signs:

- Abdominal pain
- Bloody diarrhea that does not clear up from over the counter medicines
- Fatigue or tired
- Weight loss and loss of appetite
- Bleeding from the rectum
- Loss of body fluids (dehydration)
- Eye inflammation or irritation

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Testing for Ulcerative Colitis

The doctor will take a medical history and perform a physical examination. Tell your health care team about the signs you have and when they get better or worse. Laboratory tests will be ordered and may include:

- Hemoccult Test: Stool samples are sent to a lab to check for blood.
- Blood Tests: Depending on your signs, blood tests may be used to look for infection, anemia (low iron in blood), or other markers of inflammation to help diagnose this condition.
- Colonoscopy: This test looks at the inside of the colon. A flexible tube is used to look inside the rectum and colon. Sometimes a sample of tissue is taken to be examined in the laboratory. This is called a biopsy.
- Sigmoidoscopy: This test uses a flexible tube with a light on the end of it to look inside the rectum and colon. While a colonoscopy looks at all of the colon, a sigmoidoscopy is used to look at the last part of the colon, called the sigmoid.
- Barium Enema: This is an x-ray of your colon. You will be given an enema of a liquid, called barium. The barium will make your colon show up on the x-ray by coating the lining of the colon so that ulcers can be detected.
- CT Scan: A computerized tomography (CT) scan may done to look at the general abdominal area. It is a diagnostic test that may be used to check if there are other concerns related or not related to the colitis.

Treatment

There is no known cure for ulcerative colitis, but many treatment options can be used to reduce your signs and to improve your quality of life. You may need to try several different types of treatment to find one that works best for you.

Diet

There is no single diet that seems to help everyone with ulcerative colitis. Some patients have major nutrition problems like weight loss. Talk with a dietitian about the food you should eat to get the best nutrition while your colon heals. Here are a few general tips that may help:
- Eat small, frequent meals
- Limit foods with lactose in them if they cause gas. This includes dairy foods like milk, cheese and ice cream.
- Limit fat and fatty foods, especially fried foods. 40 or 50 grams of fat a day is a good goal for most people but some people can eat more without problems.
- Reduce or stop eating sugar alcohols (artificial sweeteners). This is a type of sugar found in food products labeled “sugar-free” or “no sugar added” such as sugarless gums and candies. Check the product’s ingredient list for sugar alcohols such as erythritol, hydrogenated starch hydrolysates, isomalt, lactitol, maltitol, mannitol, sorbitol and xylitol.
- Reduce gas producing foods like beans, peas, broccoli, cabbage and wheat bran.
- Reduce fructose which is fruit sugar. This includes high fructose corn syrup, honey and high fructose containing fruits like apples, pears, oranges and cherries.
- Talk to your doctor about taking probiotics to increase your good “intestinal flora.” This is the good bacteria in your colon.

**Medicines**

There are different types of medicines used to treat ulcerative colitis:

- Anti-inflammatory medicines: Medicines that are used to control inflammation or discomfort in the colon and rectum.
- Immune suppression medicines: Medicines that reduce the body’s reaction for the irritant that is causing ulcers in the colon. These medicines may be given alone or with anti-inflammatory medicines.
- Antibiotics: Depending on your condition, to avoid bacteria from further eroding the lining of the colon, antibiotics may be used.
- Iron supplements: If you have chronic bleeding, you may need an iron supplement to avoid anemia or low iron in the blood. Iron is important for the hemoglobin, a protein molecule in red blood cells that transports oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood.
- Other medicines may be given for discomfort, such as pain medicines or anti-diarrhea medicines.
**Surgery**
Partial or full removal of the colon may be used to help treat your condition. Talk with your doctor about your surgery options.

**Sleep and Stress**
Getting enough sleep and lowering your stress can help this condition. Support groups or counseling may also help with stress.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.