

THE LANGUAGE OF IBD

What are the meanings of the names enteritis; colitis; Crohn's disease; ileitis; Crohn's colitis; ulcerative proctitis?

All of these terms refer to inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Inflammation of any part of the small intestine can be called 'enteritis' (from the Greek word 'enteron' meaning intestine).

Inflammation of the colon is called 'colitis'. Crohn's disease (named after the doctor who, with Doctors Ginsburg and Oppenheimer, first described the condition in 1932) is an ulcerating inflammation affecting the lining and deeper layers of the wall of the bowel - it can be in the ileum (small intestine) when it is sometimes called ileitis and/or it can be in the colon when it is called Crohn's colitis.

Ulcerative colitis is an ulcerating inflammation of the inner lining of the colon.

Ulcerative proctitis is the name given to ulcerative colitis limited to the rectum.

Abscess

A localised collection of pus which may form in the abdominal cavity or in the rectal area of persons with IBD.

Acute (illness)

Short lived or sudden.

Adhesion

Scar tissue (often resulting from surgery) that can lead to one part of the bowel binding to another.

Aetiology

Cause.

5-aminosalicylic acid (5-ASA)

A substance which reduces inflammation in colitis and may decrease the risk of relapse. The active ingredient in drugs such as Asacol™ and Pentasa®.

Anaemia

A lowered concentration of haemoglobin in the blood. Haemoglobin is the pigment which carries oxygen in the red cells.

Anastomosis

The surgical joining of two ends of healthy bowel.

Ankylosing spondylitis

A chronic inflammatory disease of the spine and adjacent joints which causes pain and stiffness in the spine, neck, hips, jaw and rib cage.

Antigen

A substance, usually a protein, which is recognised as 'foreign' by a patient's body, so that antibodies are produced against it. Reaction between antigen and antibody may cause inflammation.

Anus

The opening at the lower end of the gastrointestinal tract at the end of the rectum.

Appendix

A thin blind-ending pouch of intestine attached to the caecum; that part of the colon situated in the right lower abdomen.

Appliance

The combination of flange and bag worn over a stoma to collect bodily waste.

Arthralgia

Pains in the joints frequently experienced by persons with IBD.

Arthritis

Inflammation of a joint accompanied by pain, swelling and stiffness.

Azathioprine (Imuran®)

An immunosuppressant drug used to treat IBD.

Bacteria

Minute organisms, millions of which are normally present in the large intestine, but some of which can cause infection.

Benign

Not cancerous.

Bile ducts

Tube-like structures that transport bile from the liver or gallbladder to the duodenum.

Biological agents (biologicals)

A category of immunomodulator medications that work by blocking the effects of specific substances that are produced by the immune system during the process of inflammation.

Biopsy

A small piece of tissue taken from the body for examination under the microscope by a pathologist. It helps in the diagnosis of IBD.

Borborygmi

Characteristic rumbling sounds in the bowel caused by the movement of air through the intestine. Everybody has them whether or not they have IBD.

Bone marrow suppression

The decreased manufacture of blood cells by bone marrow. This is a serious side effect of medical therapy and may be caused by some medications used to treat IBD e.g. azathioprine, methotrexate.

Bowel

Another name for the intestines, the small bowel (duodenum, jejunum and ileum), and the large bowel (colon).

Breath tests

Simple painless tests which help detect lactose (milk sugar) intolerance, and other abnormalities of intestinal function.

Bypass

A surgical re-routing of the intestine (see also resection).

Caecum

The first 10-15 cms of the colon, situated in the right lower abdomen.

CDAI – Crohn's Disease Activity Index

A method of scoring the symptoms of Crohn's disease to determine the severity of the disease.

Cholestyramine (Questran®)

A drug taken to absorb excessive amounts of bile acid reaching the large intestine, and hence to treat certain forms of diarrhoea.

Chronic (illness)

Long lasting or slow.

Clubbing

An abnormal curved shaping of the finger nails seen in some persons with IBD.

Colectomy

Surgical removal of the colon.

Colestipol (Colestid®)

A drug which binds bile salts to prevent diarrhoea.

Colon

The large intestine; the function of the colon is to absorb water; it is about 1.5 metres long.

Colonoscopy

An examination of the rectum and colon performed by passing a lighted flexible telescope (colonoscope) via the anus.

Colostomy

A surgical operation in which the cut end of the colon is brought through an opening in the abdominal wall. Waste is then collected in a bag attached to the skin and fitted over the colon, which is fashioned into a spout.

Computerised (axial) tomography scan (CT or CAT scan)

An x-ray procedure that, with the aid of a computer, combines many x-ray images to produce a three-dimensional image of the internal organs and other structures of the body.

Constipation

Infrequent passage of hard stools.

Corticosteroid

A type of hormone produced by the adrenal glands naturally. Prednisone and prednisolone are synthetic corticosteroids used to reduce inflammation.

C-Reactive Protein (CRP) test

A blood test used to detect inflammation and infection.

Cyclosporin

An immunosuppressant drug commonly used after kidney and other transplant operations, and occasionally used in IBD.

Diarrhoea

Excessive number of loose and watery stools.

Dietician

A specially trained individual who is qualified to assess nutritional status and work closely with the patient and doctor to ensure that an appropriate diet is being followed.

Dilated

Widened.

Distension

An uncomfortable swollen feeling in the abdomen often caused by excessive amounts of gas and fluid in the intestine.

Duodenum

The first of the three segments of the small intestine.

Dysplasia

Alterations in the cells of the colon lining seen on microscope examination of a biopsy, suggesting a possible increased risk of cancer developing subsequently.

Elemental diet

A specially prepared liquid meal without residue, but containing all the necessary nutrients.

Endoscopy

A general term for the examination of the inside of the body using a lighted telescope inserted through a natural body opening, e.g. colonoscopy and sigmoidoscopy via the anus, and gastroscopy via the mouth. The endoscopist is a specially trained physician or surgeon.

Enema

A liquid inserted into the bowel via the anus, for diagnosis or treatment.

Enteral

Of or relating to the gastrointestinal tract.

Enteroclysis

An x-ray procedure to study the entire length of the small bowel.

Erythema nodosum

Red, tender swellings occasionally seen on the shins and lower legs during a flare-up of IBD. They usually subside when the disease is in remission.

ESR – Erythrocyte Sedimentation Rate

A blood test used to assess the severity of inflammation.

Exacerbation

An aggravation of symptoms; an increase in the activity of the disease; a relapse.

Extra-intestinal

Occurring outside of the intestines.

Faeces

Motions; stools; wastes.

Familial

A family characteristic.

Febrile

Running a fever, having a temperature.

Ferritin

A blood test which measures the patient's iron reserves, and hence the need for iron treatment.

Fissure

A crack or split in the skin, usually in the area of the anus.

Fistula

An abnormal channel (false passage) between two loops of intestine, or between the intestine and another organ, or between the intestine and the skin.

Flare-up

The recurrence of symptoms of IBD.

Flatus

An awareness of the passage of gas through the rectum, not necessarily in excessive amounts.

Folic acid

One of the vitamins responsible for the formation of the red blood cells; folate deficiency may occur as a result of poor diet, or due to poor absorption by the small intestine. Folate deficiency due to sulphasalazine treatment is fairly rare but it can easily be corrected by taking oral supplements.

Gastroenterologist

A physician specially trained in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the intestine, including Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis.

Gut

Another word for bowel or intestine.

Haemorrhoids (piles)

Swollen veins in the area of the anus which bleed easily. They may become painful.

Heartburn

A burning pain usually felt in the chest and due to reflux of stomach acid and bile into the gullet. Common in the whole population.

Hydrocortisone

A corticosteroid drug given intravenously or as a foam enema.

Hyperalimentation

Extra nutrition given into a vein. See 'Total Parenteral Nutrition (TPN)'

I.B.D.

Abbreviation for 'Inflammatory Bowel Disease'.

Ileum

The lower part of the small intestine, which joins the colon at the ileo-caecal valve.

Ileoanal anastomosis

A surgical operation for ulcerative colitis where, after total colectomy, an internal pouch is made from the ileum and attached to the anus, thus preserving continence and allowing evacuation in the normal manner. This operation is also known as the 'pouch' or Parks operation.

Ileostomy

A surgical operation in which the cut end of the ileum is brought through an opening in the abdominal wall. Waste is then collected in a bag attached to the skin and fitted over the ileum, which is fashioned into a spout.

Immunology

The study of the body's immune system.

Immunomodulators

A category of medicines that control inflammation by suppressing the immune system.

Incontinence

An ability to retain stools or urine.

Infusion

The introduction of fluid into the body via a vein.

Iritis

Painful inflammation of the eyes sometimes occurring in IBD.

Irritable bowel syndrome, irritable colon

A common condition caused by altered motility of the bowels. It produces diarrhoea or constipation and abdominal discomfort. It is not a form of IBD.

-itis

Indicates inflammation e.g. colitis is inflammation of the colon; proctitis is inflammation of the rectum; ileitis is inflammation of the ileum.

Jejunum

The middle segment of the small intestine, between the duodenum and the ileum.

Lactase

Is the enzyme which enables the small intestine to digest lactose.

Lactose

Milk sugar.

Lactose intolerance

A common and harmless disorder producing abdominal discomfort, diarrhoea and gas after the ingestion of milk or milk products. This may need treatment with a milk-free diet.

Lesion

A term used by doctors to describe any structural abnormality.

Leucocytosis

An increased number of white cells in the blood.

Leucopenia

A decrease in the number of white cells in the blood.

Loperamide (Imodium®)

An anti-diarrhoeal drug which slows the contraction of muscle in the gut.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI scan)

A diagnostic procedure carried out by a machine that uses a strong magnetic field to produce computerised images of body structures.

Maintenance therapy

Medical therapy taken when IBD is not active to prevent recurrence of the disease and/or flare-ups of symptoms.

Malabsorption

Decreased ability of the small intestine to absorb nutrients.

Malaise

Generally feeling unwell.

6-mercaptopurine (6-MP)

An immunosuppressant drug closely related to azathioprine, used for reducing flare-ups of IBD.

Mesalazine

A coated formulation of the drug 5-aminosalicylic acid to deliver the drug to the ileum and colon (e.g. Asacol™, Pentasa®).

Methotrexate (Methoblastin®)

An immunosuppressant drug with some use in IBD which is not responding to other drugs.

Metronidazole (Flagyl®)

An antibiotic which may be helpful in treating anal inflammation in IBD.

Mucosa (intestinal)

The innermost lining of the intestine.

Mucus

A white slimy lubricant produced by the intestines. It is found in excess in the stools of patients with colitis.

Nasogastric tube

A thin flexible plastic tube passed through the nose into the stomach.

Obstruction

A blockage of the small or large intestine, often due to narrowing of one part of it.

Occult blood

Non-visible blood in the stool, which can easily be detected by a simple laboratory test.

Oedema

Accumulation of excessive amounts of fluid in the tissues resulting in swelling.

Oesophagus

The part of the gastrointestinal tract from the back of the mouth to the stomach.

Olsalazine (Dipentum®)

Two 5-ASA molecules joined together chemically so they can be broken down by bacteria in the colon to release the 5-ASA.

Ostomy

An artificial opening of the intestine onto the wall of the abdomen (see stoma).

Pathologist

A doctor who is a specialist in the examination of tissues under the microscope.

Perforation

An abnormal opening in the bowel wall which causes the contents of the bowel to spill into the normally sterile abdominal cavity.

Perianal

The area round the anal opening.

Peritoneum

The membrane lining the inside of the abdominal cavity.

Peritonitis

Inflammation of the peritoneum often due to a perforation.

“Pouch” operation (ileoanal anastomosis)

An operation involving the removal of diseased colon and rectum and formation of an internal pouch using a length of ileum which is attached directly to the anus. Performed commonly in young people with ulcerative colitis (see ileoanal anastomosis).

Pouchitis

Inflammation of the pouch. The exact cause is unknown.

Prednisolone/prednisone

Are medications of the corticosteroid group used to reduce inflammation in IBD. They can be taken as tablets, intravenously by injection, or through the rectum as an enema or suppository.

Proctocolectomy

Removal by surgical operation of the colon and rectum. The patient is left with an ileostomy.

Prodrug

A compound that is inactive, but when taken, is converted within the body to its active form which exerts a medical effect.

Prognosis

What might happen in the future (to the progress of the disease).

Prophylactic therapy

Preventive treatment.

Purinethol[®] See 6-mercaptopurine.

Pyoderma gangrenosum

A type of chronic skin ulceration which sometimes occurs on the extremities of persons with IBD.

Radiologist

A doctor who specialises in X-ray, ultra-sound and similar examinations.

Recurrence/relapse

Return of the disease activity.

Rectum

The last part of the large intestine, which ends at the anus, and is used to store faeces.

Remission

A lessening of symptoms of the disease and a return to good health.

Resection

The surgical removal of a diseased part of the intestine.

Reservoir

An internal pouch created from loops of small intestine.

Rheumatologist

A medically qualified doctor with special training in the diagnosis and treatment of patients with diseases of the joints and muscles.

Sigmoidoscopy

The passing of a short lighted telescope through the anus to inspect the lining (mucosa) of the rectum and the lower colon.

Small bowel enema

Barium sulphate is introduced into the small intestine through a tube. The barium sulphate adheres to the lining of the small bowel allowing x-ray pictures to be taken.

Small intestine

That section of the gastrointestinal tract which digests food and absorbs nutrients after they have passed through the stomach.

Spastic colon

See irritable bowel syndrome. It is not an inflammatory bowel disease although some of the symptoms are similar.

Spastic colitis

See irritable bowel syndrome and spastic colon.

Sphincter

A ring of muscle surrounding an opening such as the anus (anal sphincter).

Stoma

A surgically constructed opening of the intestine onto the abdominal wall over which a bag can be fitted and sealed to the skin.

Stoma Therapist

A nurse specialising in the care of stomas.

Stool

Bowel motion, faeces.

Stricture

An irreversible narrowing of the gut due to scarring.

Sulphasalazine (Salazopyrin[®])

A medication which combines 5-aminosalicylic acid with a sulphonamide derivative. It is used to treat flare-ups and to maintain remission in IBD.

Suppository

A bullet-shaped plug containing a drug for insertion into the rectum. For use where medication is required only in the last 8-15cm of the colon and the rectum.

Tenesmus

A persistent urge to empty the bowel usually caused by inflammation of the rectum.

Terminal ileum

The lowest end of the small intestine before it joins the large intestine.

Toxic megacolon

Dilatation of the colon which may lead to perforation, usually in a very severe attack of ulcerative colitis, or Crohn's colitis. Urgent surgery is almost always performed.

Total Parenteral Nutrition (TPN)

Intravenous infusion of all the patient's requirements of nutrients through a fine tube (catheter) placed in a large vein.

UCDAI – Ulcerative Colitis Disease Activity Index

A method of scoring the symptoms of ulcerative colitis to determine the severity of the disease.

Viruses

Microorganisms which can replicate only within other cells. They do not usually respond to antibiotics.

This information is for general informational purposes and does not constitute medical advice. Please seek information and advice regarding your condition and/or treatment from your doctor.



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