

IBD Unclassified

This information sheet is for people who want to learn more about inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) unclassified.

Key points

- Inflammatory bowel disease unclassified (IBDU) shares similarities with the two of the main types of IBD, Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis.
- People are diagnosed with IBDU when it isn't clear if they have Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis.
- IBDU may lead to a diagnosis of Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis in the future.

What is IBD unclassified?

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are the two main types of IBD and because they share many similarities it can sometimes be difficult to tell the difference.

IBDU, also known as indeterminate colitis, is a type of IBD where it isn't clear if it is Crohn's or ulcerative colitis. This means signs of both diseases will appear in the gut. For example, inflammation caused by Crohn's disease affects the full thickness of the gut while ulcerative colitis only affects the inner surface of the gut. In IBDU, this could mean that ulcers in the large intestine (a common sign of ulcerative colitis) affect the gut deeper than expected and there is no other sign that it's Crohn's. If there is a disease in the small intestine then it is usually considered to be Crohn's disease.

IBDU can lean more towards either Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis. In the future, changes in the disease behaviour or appearance may result in a diagnosis of Crohn's or ulcerative colitis. Some people keep their IBDU diagnosis for the rest of their lives.

What are the symptoms of IBD unclassified?

Symptoms of IBDU depend on where inflammation appears in your gut and can be serious or mild. People experience symptoms differently from each other. The most common symptoms are:

- Abdominal pain
- Frequent diarrhoea (sometimes mixed with mucus and blood)
- Tiredness, fatigue
- Raised temperature, fever

- Loss of appetite, weight loss
- Anaemia (reduced level of blood cells)

Less common symptoms are joint pain, mouth ulcers, eye inflammation, liver inflammation, and skin rashes.

How do I know if I have IBD unclassified?

There are no official diagnosis standards for IBDU yet and the disease classification is still being debated by health professionals. The unclear nature of IBDU can make it difficult in the diagnosis stage and when deciding on treatment.

What is known is that IBDU is usually diagnosed in children and may settle into either Crohn's or colitis as they grow older. To know if you have IBDU you need to be tested by a doctor. Tests may include:

Blood tests: To assess inflammation and see if you have low nutrition levels.

Stool tests: Used to make sure your symptoms are not caused by an infection. Can also detect inflammation through a test for faecal calprotectin levels, which is a marker of white blood cells released from the inflammation of the gut lining.

Endoscopy: Used to view the digestive system with an endoscope or tube with a camera and light at the end. A tissue sample (biopsy) may also be collected and examined. Different endoscopies that may be used for IBDU include upper GI endoscopy, colonoscopy, and sigmoidoscopy.

Bowel imaging and scans: Used to discover inflammation and complications like strictures (narrowing of the gut), fistulae or abscesses. This could be through MRI, CT, or intestinal ultrasound.

What kind of treatments are there for IBD unclassified?

There are not many clinical trials that focus on treating IBDU so in many cases the disease will be treated in a similar way to ulcerative colitis.

For help or information

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