

Microscopic Colitis

This information sheet is for people who want to learn about microscopic colitis.

Key points

- Microscopic colitis is a less common inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) that causes inflammation in the large intestine.
- Causes of microscopic colitis seem to be related to gut damage from viruses, bacteria or medicine.
- There is no cure for microscopic colitis but it can be managed well with medicine.

What is microscopic colitis?

Microscopic colitis is a type of IBD that can cause inflammation in the large intestine (colon). This disease is not as common as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis and is less well recognised.

The gut has many layers and microscopic colitis affects the inner layer of the intestines. There are two types of microscopic colitis. How the disease affects this inner layer of the gut decides which of the two it is:

- Lymphocytic colitis (LC) – where the inner lining has more white blood cells (lymphocytes) than usual.
- Collagenous colitis (CC) – where the inner lining has a thicker layer of collagen, a protein important in providing structure in the body, than usual.

Although they look different under the microscope, symptoms and treatment are the same. However slightly more people have LC, and women are more likely to have CC. Some people may even have both types of microscopic colitis, but at different times.

What does living with microscopic colitis mean for me?

Microscopic colitis is a chronic condition which means that it is for life. Symptoms of the disease can have a real impact on life. The unpredictable nature can mean some days aren't good and you can feel that you no longer know your own body. This can make going out with friends, work and planning activities difficult. Coping with these symptoms may make you feel isolated and low but with careful planning and a strong support network you can take control of your own health.

What is the cause of microscopic colitis?

What causes microscopic colitis is still unknown but it seems to be related to damage to the gut caused by:

- Medications that can irritate the lining of the colon.
- Bacteria that produce toxins that irritate the lining of the colon.
- Viruses that trigger inflammation.
- Autoimmune disease associated with microscopic colitis.
- Bile acid not being properly absorbed and irritating the lining of the colon.

Other factors such as genes, gender, and smoking may also have a role to play in causing microscopic colitis. There is no cure for microscopic colitis but treatment can reduce or remove symptoms. Microscopic colitis has no effect on life expectancy and doesn't make you more likely to get colon cancer.

What are the symptoms of microscopic colitis?

The main symptom of microscopic colitis is ongoing watery diarrhoea. This is where you pass watery or loose poo more than three times a day for longer than four weeks. For some people this can be as many as fifteen times during the day and night. It may begin suddenly or gradually, be explosive, and can happen at any time and may be every time you go to the toilet, or only now and then. Other symptoms can include tummy pain, fatigue, joint pain, bloating, and wind.

How do I know if I have microscopic colitis?

Microscopic colitis is less well known by health professionals and the general public, so it can be difficult to get a diagnosis. For diagnosis, you might get a colonoscopy with biopsy (because in microscopic colitis, changes in the gut can only be seen under the microscope). You may also have a test for bile acid malabsorption.

For more detailed information on the topics discussed on this information sheet, as well as the treatment options for microscopic colitis, visit the Crohn's & Colitis Australia website through the QR code below.

For help or information

Scan QR code for website:



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Use the website search function to find more information about treatment:

- [Microscopic colitis treatment](#)