

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (Crohn's Disease)



Definition of a Disability

The Equality Act (2010) replaced the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) in providing protection and legal rights for disabled people. It uses the following definition of disability:

“The Act defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term (i.e. has lasted or is likely to last for at least twelve months) adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

More information on the Act can be found at

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG_4001068

▶ Inflammatory Bowel Disease as a Disability

Ulcerative Colitis and Crohn's Disease are known jointly as Inflammatory Bowel Disease – IBD [IBD is not to be confused with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) which is a completely separate condition, but which shares some symptoms with IBD].

Crohn's Disease is a chronic (ongoing) condition, which is not infectious. The most common age for diagnosis is between 15 and 35 (although diagnosis can occur at any age). There is a higher chance of developing Crohn's if you have a close relative who has the condition. In 10-15% of cases, Ulcerative Colitis (UC) and Crohn's may be difficult to distinguish from another similar condition known as Ulcerative Colitis. Men and women suffer equally. Crohn's Disease affects approx 55,000 people in the UK. Approximately 3,000 new cases are diagnosed each year.

▶ Defining Crohn's Disease

The symptoms of Crohn's Disease vary according to its site, (i.e. small or large intestine), and severity. Anywhere from the mouth to the anus can be affected, but Crohn's Disease is most common in the small intestine and/or colon. It causes inflammation, deep ulcers and scarring to the wall of the intestine and often occurs in patches. The main symptoms are pain in the abdomen, urgent diarrhoea, general tiredness and loss of weight. However, the following features occur in most cases:

Diarrhoea - sometimes, but not always, with blood

Abdominal pain and tenderness over the intestine

Weight loss and, in children, failure to grow

Fever

Tiredness

Sores and abscesses around the anus, which may discharge. These may be the first sign of the disease in some patients Some people suffer pains in their joints, which can make moving about difficult

There may be eye problems and mouth ulcers

Some of the drugs used for treatment may also cause unwanted side effects, such as inability to concentrate, mood swings, extreme tiredness, loss of appetite and headaches

Inflammatory processes can affect both a person's appetite and the way in which nutrients are used within the body, causing growth to be impaired. The person concerned may look and feel different from their peers and may find themselves excluded from social activities. It is important to treat students in ways appropriate to their age rather than their physical appearance

Students may feel isolated from their peers as a result of missing lectures or being unable to join activities due to symptoms such as diarrhoea

The severity of the symptoms fluctuate unpredictably over time. Patients are likely to experience flare-ups in between intervals of remission or reduced symptoms

The cause or causes have not yet been identified in either illness. Both genetic factors and environmental triggers are likely to be involved.

Students with Crohn's Disease may have periods with few symptoms, then flare-ups when symptoms are acute. How often they occur - and how long they last - varies from person to person. Some of the major difficulties as a result of the illness are that:

▶ **Crohn's Disease is:**

Not the same as the more common Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Not infectious

Not caused by stress (although stress may make the condition worse)

Not a short-term illness (There is no cure at present.)

Not a form of cancer

▶ **Possible arrangements**

The student may wish to sit close to the exit during lectures, tutorials or classes in order to leave the room quickly if need be

An urgent need for the toilet (particularly after food) may lead to late arrival at seminars or lectures. Students may want to be provided with lecture notes or the use a note-taker

A student may miss teaching or deadlines because of medical and hospital appointments, being ill at home or hospital admissions. Arrangements need to be made to ensure that they are able to meet the academic requirements of the course

Lateness may also result if there is some distance to be covered between rooms. Extreme tiredness or joint pains may slow a student down. If possible, venues should be close together

During exams it may be helpful to seat the student close to the door nearest the toilets and to arrange in advance who will escort them to the toilet if they need to go urgently. Sometimes it may be helpful to provide a separate room

The use of a staff or dedicated disabled toilet. It may also be helpful if the student can have the facility of a locker by a toilet to keep spare clothes and washing kit in case of accidents, particularly if their accommodation is not nearby

A student may need to take prescribed drugs at certain times of day, for example before meals

Some people with Crohn's Disease may need to take a basic diet through a tube direct into the stomach. This may mean that the student may come to college or lectures with the tube in position

Visits and field trips may be problematic if toilet facilities on a coach or during the trip are not investigated in advance

▶ Treatment

Crohn's Disease is an ongoing illness for which, at present, there is no cure. However, there are particular medicines that are effective in their treatment and most of these are designed to work in one or more of these four ways:

reducing the inflammation in the bowel

prolonging remission (increasing the time between flare-ups)

relieving particular symptoms

reducing the possible long-term effects of the disease

- Drugs designed to relieve particular symptoms of IBD include the following:

anti-diarrhoeals (to help lessen diarrhoea)

bulking agents (to help with difficulty in passing stools)

analgesics (to help reduce pain)

treatments for anaemia (when there is too little haemoglobin in the blood)

supplements (extra vitamins and minerals)

These medicines are prescribed when particular symptoms of IBD are present and are causing difficulty or distress. Some of the medicines will not need to be taken all the time, and the individual will probably decide when they need them. The condition is relapsing and remitting. Most patients remain under hospital follow-up. Urgent consultation or hospital admission may be required for 'flare-ups'.

▶ Diagnosis

Diagnosis, and the provision of medical evidence, is through the student's GP or specialist. The evidence can be used to apply for any appropriate examination arrangements.

▶ Requesting special examination arrangements

Information about applying for special exam arrangements can be found at: www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/exams

Requests for examination concessions must be applied for via the college office.

▶ **Funding**

Information about applying for **funding** can be found at:
www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/funding

▶ **Contacts**

Disability Office (see below)

Oxford University Student Union (OUSU)

Thomas Hull House, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford, OX1 2HU.

Vice-President – Welfare:

Tel: 01864 (2) 88461. Email: welfare@ousu.org

Web: www.ousu.org/welfare

OUSU has an active Disabilities Action Group, which works to raise awareness of disability issues in the University.

The National Association for Colitis and Crohn's Disease (NACC)

4 Beaumont House, Sutton Road, St Albans, Herts, AL1 5HH.

Information Line: 0845 130 2233. NACC in contact support line 0845 130 3344. Website: www.nacc.org.uk. Email: nacc@nacc.org.uk. This organisation offers:

Information (via literature, meetings, and a telephone information line)

Support (through local Groups, NACC-in-Contact, and a Disability Benefits Project)

A 'Can't Wait' Card – recognised by some major retailers – enables quicker access to toilets

A Welfare Fund for people in financial difficulty as a result of these illnesses.

Useful websites:

<http://www.crohns.org.uk/>

<http://www.corecharity.org.uk/>

Information on public conveniences in Oxford City:

www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decER/2_Public_Toilets_occw.htm

Disability Advisory Service

E-mail: disabililty@admin.ox.ac.uk

Website: www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das

Tel: +44 (0)1865 280 459

Fax: +44 (0)1865 289 830