

# Understanding and Managing Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Did you know that Canada has one of the highest rates of Inflammatory Bowel Disease in the world?

It is estimated that a new person is diagnosed with Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) every 48 minutes in Canada. The number of new diagnoses is rising most in children under six-years-old. There is also an increasing rate of IBD in older adults due to better therapies that are helping people with IBD live longer.



World Inflammatory Bowel Disease Day is celebrated every year on May 19 with countries all over the world showing support for people living with this invisible disease.

## What is IBD?

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is a condition that causes ongoing inflammation of the intestines. It is a lifelong disease where the immune system attacks the digestive system, causing inflammation and damage. This leads to problems with digestion, absorbing nutrients, immunity, and getting rid of bodily waste.

Moderate or mild symptoms of IBD may include belly pain, frequent diarrhea that may contain blood or pus, fever, chills, weight loss, and fatigue. The inflammation due to IBD can also impact other parts of the body such as the eyes or joints and may cause a form of arthritis. Symptoms can occur intermittently, coinciding with periods of active disease (flares) and symptom-free periods (remission).

## What is the difference between IBD and IBS?

IBD differs from Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) in a few ways. IBS does not impact the immune system or cause inflammation. IBS is far more common than IBD and impacts 18 per cent of Canadians, potentially recurring many times throughout a person's life.

There are two types of IBD: Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis. The difference between the two is based on where the inflammation occurs.

- Crohn's Disease presents as inflammation in the small intestine but can affect any part of the digestive tract.
- Ulcerative Colitis is typically inflammation in the colon (or large intestine) and the rectum.

People with IBD may have different experiences depending on where the inflammation is. They may notice:

- Abdominal pain and cramping
- Severe diarrhea
- Rectal bleeding or blood in stool
- Weight loss
- Low appetite



## Living with IBD

IBD is treated with medicines and, sometimes, with diet changes which can keep the disease in remission. If the disease is in remission, treatment may not be required. A severe attack of IBD may require hospitalization and, in some severe cases, surgery may be needed. IBD increases the risks of colon cancer, so it is important to ask your doctor about cancer screening. The level of risk depends on the type of IBD you have and how long you've had it.

The exact cause of IBD is unknown which is why there is no cure for this disease. Research has found that genetics and the environment can put people at risk of IBD or protect against it. One of these factors is diet. Many people are interested in managing IBD through diet to avoid medication or surgery. The nutrition recommendations for people with IBD are to follow a Mediterranean Diet, focusing on:

- whole grains
- lean proteins
- a variety of fruits and vegetables
- a moderate reduction in red meats, saturated fat, added sugars and processed foods

To learn more, visit [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts).

People with IBD may avoid certain foods to try to control their symptoms. It is recommended to keep a food and symptom journal to see which foods are best for you. Search "journal" at [ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts](https://ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts) for ideas.

Keep in mind that food restrictions are only recommended for people with known intolerance. These restrictions should be short-term and challenged periodically to avoid malnutrition. A registered dietitian can help tailor a healthy diet that is right for you.

For more support:

- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on [ahs.ca/811](https://ahs.ca/811)
- Visit [ahs.ca/Nutrition](https://ahs.ca/Nutrition).
- Call, text, or chat with 211 Alberta ([ab.211.ca/](https://ab.211.ca/)) to find out about financial benefits, programs, and services
- For more information on IBD, look to Crohn's and Colitis Canada at [crohnsandcolitis.ca](https://crohnsandcolitis.ca)

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