
Flare-ups

This information is about flare-ups in people aged 16 and over.

This information will explain what a flare-up is and the signs to look out for. It will help you understand what to do:

- If you think you are having a flare-up
- To reduce your risk of having a flare-up

If your child is aged under 16 and you think they are having a flare-up, contact their GP or IBD team. Our [supporting your child](#) resource has information on signs of a flare-up in children.

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Key facts about flare-ups

- A flare-up is when symptoms come back and you feel unwell.
- Signs of a flare-up include going for a poo more than 5 times in 24 hours – or more than is normal for you, loose poo or diarrhoea with blood or mucus for more than 3 days and abdominal pain.

- Everyone experiences flare-ups differently. They can last anywhere from a few days to several months.
- If you have a personalised care and support plan, follow the guidance given.
- If you don't have a care and support plan and are having a flare-up, contact your IBD team or GP.

What is a flare-up?

A flare-up is when symptoms come back and you feel unwell. Everyone experiences flare-ups differently. Your symptoms may also change over time. Flare-ups can last anywhere from a few days to several months and you may have different symptoms during a flare-up than you had when you were first diagnosed.

Signs of flare-up can include:

- Loose poo, or diarrhoea which may contain blood
- Urgently needing to poo
- Pain in the tummy area
- Generally feeling unwell

You may also experience symptoms outside the gut during a flare-up such as:

- Joint pain and swelling (arthritis)
- Swelling in the eyes
- Mouth ulcers
- Skin rashes
- Fatigue
- Mental health problems

Read our information on [managing symptoms](#) to find out more.

I'm having a flare-up - what should I do?

If you have a written [personalised care and support plan](#) or your IBD team have agreed with you previously what to do if your symptoms get worse, follow the specific guidance given by your doctor or nurse.

If you do not have a personalised plan contact your local [IBD team](#) or GP via phone or email. If you are unable to contact your GP or IBD team, call [NHS 111](#) or contact your [local out-of-hours service](#).

Please be aware that our [Helpline](#) is **not** able to give individual advice on this.

When should I seek urgent or emergency care?

You will know your body and condition better than anyone. If you feel you need urgent care phone 111. If you need emergency care call 999. It's important to go to hospital if you're advised to.

Go to A&E or call 999 if you:

- Have severe [dehydration](#) or malnourishment
- Are vomiting up blood
- Have severe tummy pain, a high temperature and a rapid heartbeat
- Are bleeding non-stop from your bottom
- Have a stoma and think it might be blocked. Signs of stoma blockage include: not passing wind or poo, passing watery poo, nausea, bloating or swelling tummy, tummy cramps, swollen stoma, nausea or vomiting or both.

All medicines have a small risk of side effects, such as chest pain, rapid heartbeat or hives. If you experience any side effects that you are worried about while taking your medicine, contact your IBD team or your GP as soon as possible.

Flare-up guidance - Ulcerative Colitis

If you have Ulcerative Colitis and are experiencing a flare-up, you may be able to temporarily increase the amount of [5-ASA](#) medicine you take.

If you decide to do this, it's important to inform your IBD team or GP of any changes as soon as possible by telephone or email. You may also want to check with your healthcare professional first if you are pregnant or have another health condition.

If you are taking 5-ASAs, you can take up to the amount below for 8 weeks, unless you have already been told by your healthcare professional not to increase your dose.

This advice only applies to 5-ASAs, not any other medicine you may be taking.

- Salofalk: maximum 3g per day
- Asacol: maximum 4.8g per day
- Mezavant: maximum 4.8g per day
- Pentasa: maximum 4g per day
- Octasa: maximum 4.8g per day

You may see your dose in g or mg: 1g = 1000mg, 0.8g = 800mg, 0.5g = 500mg.

Check the Patient Information Leaflet inside your medicine box or online at [medicines.org.uk/emc](https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc) to find out what dosage is in your medicine.

Even if your symptoms settle quickly, continue taking your increased dose for 8 weeks then reduce back to your regular dose, unless advised otherwise by your IBD team or GP.

If you are prescribed suppositories or enemas and you have a supply of these at home, you can start taking these too. You can take these every night as well as increasing your 5-ASA tablets.

If your symptoms do not improve, contact your IBD team or GP. Our [appointment guide](#) has useful tips and tools to help you describe your symptoms and talk about how you are feeling.

This advice does NOT apply if you have Crohn's. If you have Crohn's and are having a flare-up, see [I'm having a flare-up - what should I do?](#)

Reducing the risk of a flare-up

What you can do to reduce the risk of a flare-up

Taking your medicines as prescribed by your IBD team, even when you feel well, reduces the risk of flare-ups. We don't yet know what causes flare-ups, but possible triggers include:

- Disruptions or changes in medicines
- Ongoing stress
- Gut infections
- Taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen

It can help to keep a diary of symptoms to see if you become aware of any triggers for you. You can find one in [My Appointments Journal](#).

Staying well

We want people with Crohn's and Colitis to feel empowered to manage their condition. Our [resources and videos](#) give information on how to manage symptoms, stay as well as possible and where to find emotional and peer support.

Our top tips for keeping as well as possible are:

- Continue taking your medication as normal unless your doctor or nurse have advised you otherwise.

- Ensure you have a good supply of medicines.
- Stay hydrated. If you are flaring and experiencing diarrhoea, it's important to make sure you are drinking enough to replace what you have lost, and in doing so getting the right balance of sugars and essential salts into your body to keep hydrated. Our information on [dehydration](#) gives tips on preventing dehydration.
- Eat well. Living with Crohn's or Colitis may mean making some changes to your diet. You may need to avoid certain foods to help your symptoms or take extra care to make sure you're getting the right nutrients. There's no single diet that works for everyone – [our food information](#) will help you understand how food affects your condition, so you can make the choices that are right for you.
- Take rest and sleep. Our [fatigue resource](#) has tips on exercise and managing fatigue.
- Quit [smoking](#).
- Avoid NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) such as ibuprofen.
- Protect your emotional and mental wellbeing. There are a number of excellent resources from organisations like [MIND](#) and the [Mental Health Foundation](#). However, if you are struggling with your Crohn's or Colitis, you may want to read our information on [mental health and wellbeing](#).

Getting support from your GP or healthcare professional

If you are unable to get in contact with your IBD team, your GP may be able to help. There are a number of resources that you may want to show your GP. The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and Crohn's & Colitis UK have created an [IBD toolkit](#), a guide to IBD and managing flares for GPs. We also have podcasts and webinars available in our [resources for healthcare professionals](#).

Help and support from Crohn's & Colitis UK

We're here for you whenever you need us. Our award-winning information on Crohn's Disease, Ulcerative Colitis, and other forms of Inflammatory Bowel Disease have the information you need to help you manage your condition.

We have information on a wide range of topics, from individual medicines to coping with symptoms and concerns about relationships and employment. We'll help you find answers, access support and take control.

All information is available on our website: crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/information

Our Helpline is a confidential service providing information and support to anyone affected by Crohn's or Colitis.

Our team can:

- Help you understand more about Crohn's and Colitis, diagnosis and treatment options
- Provide information to help you live well with your condition
- Help you understand and access disability benefits
- Be there to listen if you need someone to talk to
- Help you to find support from others living with the condition

Call us on 0300 222 5700 or email helpline@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk.

See our website for LiveChat: crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/livechat.

Crohn's & Colitis UK Forum

This closed-group community on Facebook is for everyone affected by Crohn's or Colitis.

You can share your experiences and receive support from others at:

facebook.com/groups/CCUKforum.

Help with toilet access when out

Members of Crohn's & Colitis UK get benefits including a Can't Wait Card and a RADAR key to unlock accessible toilets. This card shows that you have a medical condition, and

will help when you need urgent access to the toilet when you are out. See crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/membership for more information, or call the Membership Team on 01727 734465.

Crohn's & Colitis UK information is research-based and produced with patients, medical advisers and other professionals. They are prepared as general information and are not intended to replace advice from your own doctor or other professional. We do not endorse any products mentioned.

About Crohn's & Colitis UK

We are Crohn's & Colitis UK, a national charity fighting for improved lives today – and a world free from Crohn's and Colitis tomorrow. To improve diagnosis and treatment, and to fund research into a cure; to raise awareness and to give people hope, comfort and confidence to live freer, fuller lives. We're here for everyone affected by Crohn's and Colitis.

This information is available for free thanks to the generosity of our supporters and members. Find out how you can join the fight against Crohn's and Colitis: call 01727 734465 or visit crohnsandcolitis.org.uk.

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We hope that you've found this information helpful. You can email the Knowledge and Information Team at evidence@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk if:

- You have any comments or suggestions for improvements
- You would like more information about the research on which the information is based
- You would like details of any conflicts of interest

You can also write to us at **Crohn's & Colitis UK, 1 Bishops Square, Hatfield, Herts, AL10 9NE** or contact us through the **Helpline: 0300 222 5700**.

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