

Module 4, Lesson 8 Handout:

Crohn's Disease: Risks & Interventions

Incidence of Crohn's disease is on the rise worldwide, currently affecting anywhere from 100 to 300 out every 100,000 people. Unfortunately, Crohn's disease can be difficult to diagnose because it's symptoms are so similar to that of other inflammatory bowel diseases. It's also difficult to treat and difficult to manage because the symptoms come and go. This is super frustrating for your clients struggling with this disease, so here's what you need to know so you can support them in their health.

What is Crohn's Disease

Crohn's disease is a form of IBD which typically affects the end of the GI tract, the colon and the small intestine, though anywhere from the mouth to the anus is fair game for inflammation. Inflammation isn't continuous throughout the intestines; there can be healthy patches mixed in between areas of inflammation. It's also a relapsing inflammatory disease, meaning the inflammation can come and go.

What's additionally troubling about about Crohn's disease is that it puts clients at risk for many other diseases, such as:

- Cancer, specifically colon cancer
- Bowel obstruction
- Fistulas
- Malnutrition
- Ulcers
- Skin and joint diseases
- Anemia
- Osteoporosis

Symptoms

Symptoms vary from person to person, but for many people they occur periodically and at different discomfort and pain levels. The tricky thing about diagnosing Crohn's disease is that symptoms are so similar to that of other inflammatory bowel and GI diseases. Common symptoms include:

- Blood or mucus in stool
- Cramping and abdominal pain
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Weight Loss

Intervention & Medications

Most clients who come to you with Crohn's diseases are most likely going to be under the care of a gastroenterologist. Even though you won't be the one prescribing medications or making surgical referrals for your client, you should know what interventions they may be considering with their doctor so you can best support them. Interventions are customized to each clients' conditions and severity of Crohn's disease and may include:

- Surgery and bowel resection (this doesn't cure the patient, but rather removes the severely damaged portions of the GI tract)
- Anti-inflammatory drugs (steroids)
- Sulfa drugs and immunosuppressant drugs
- Antibiotics
- Antidiarrheals
- Pain relievers
- B12 injections
- Supplements (iron, calcium and vitamin D)

Your role in management of Crohn's disease is to work with the client to reduce symptoms and identify trigger foods and a food journal is often very helpful for both of you in this process. Some points to remember that often help in managing Crohn's disease are to eat small frequent meals, stay hydrated, limit fiber intake and of course, meet your client where they're at. If it's a new diagnosis, it may be overwhelming for them to hear the risks, interventions and diet recommendations, so starting with a food journal and learning about their individualized symptoms and food triggers is the best first step to Crohn's disease management and helping your clients feel better.