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Crohn's Disease Factsheet

What Can Science Do for Me?

This 5 x 30 minutes series of films takes five individuals each with a chronic health condition to meet the scientists working on treatment, prevention and diagnosis of their particular condition. The series was funded by Wellcome Trust and made by Media Trust Productions.

Crohn's Disease - Gareth's Journey

Stand-up comedian, Gareth Berliner, is 35 years old and was diagnosed with Crohn's disease more than twenty years ago. This unpredictable condition of the immune system causes inflammation and swelling anywhere in the digestive system. Like 10 per cent of people with Crohn's, Gareth ended up having a section of his small intestine removed. Now he is completely dependent on a catheter in his chest that provides liquid nutrients and fluids to keep him alive.

In this film, Gareth meets scientists working on different aspects of research. He's shown a 'camera pill' which improves diagnosing the disease. He finds out that certain genes make you susceptible to the disease and is shown a potential new treatment using hookworms. The final stop on his journey reveals how stem cells are now helping to make progress that could bring about a cure.

What is Crohn's disease?

Crohn's disease is a condition that causes inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract (gut). The gut consists of the oesophagus (gullet), stomach, and small and large intestine. Crohn's disease can affect any part of the gut. However, it most commonly occurs at the lower end of the small intestine, known as the ileum. Typical symptoms include, pain, ulcers and diarrhoea. Daily medication can be taken to relieve the symptoms, but sometimes surgery to remove part of the gut may be required.

Who has Crohn's disease?

Approximately 1 in 1,500 people have Crohn's disease, and the condition affects slightly more women than men. It can develop at any age, but usually starts between the ages of 15 and 40. The outlook for people with Crohn's disease varies depending on which part of the gut is affected, and the severity and frequency of the symptoms. The majority of people experience moderate symptoms from time to time and most (80%) will require surgery at some point. Rare complications, such as a perforated gut, can be life-threatening.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of Crohn's disease occur when the wall of the affected part of the gut becomes inflamed. The inflammation often causes one or more of the following symptoms:

* pain

- * ulcers
- * diarrhoea
- * feeling generally unwell - fever and extreme tiredness
- * loss of appetite and weight
- * anaemia
- * anal fissures and rectal bleeding

The symptoms vary depending on the part of the gut affected.

What causes Crohn's disease?

The exact cause of Crohn's disease is unknown. It is thought that there may be a genetic link because there is some evidence that it runs in families. One in ten people with the condition have a close relative who also has it. A bacterium or virus (germ) may be a factor in the cause of Crohn's disease. Some scientists think that in people who are genetically prone to the condition, a germ may trigger the immune system to cause inflammation in parts of the gut. Crohn's disease is more common in smokers and in women who use the combined oral contraceptive pill.

Organisations

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

NACC brings together people of all ages who have Ulcerative Colitis or Crohn's Disease, their families and the health professionals involved in their care. These two illnesses are both forms of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) and they affect about 1 in 400 people in the UK. It provides support through 70 groups, a telephone and email information service, information sheets and articles on research. It has 30,000 members.

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

Information Line: 0845 130 2233 (or 01727 844296)

NACC-in-Contact Support Line: 0845 130 3344

Fax: +44(0)1727 862550

Email: nacc@nacc.org.uk

Website: <http://www.nacc.org.uk>

Crohn's in Childhood Research Association (CICRA)

CICRA is dedicated to creating a wider understanding of Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis particularly as it affects children and young adults. It provides support for sufferers and their families and raises funds to support approved medical research aimed at finding more effective treatments and an eventual cure.



Address: Parkgate House, 356 West Barnes Lane, Motspur Park, Surrey, KT3 6NB

Tel: 020 8949 6209

Fax: 020 8942 2044

Email: support@cicra.org

Website: <http://www.cicra.org/>

The Wellcome Trust

The Wellcome Trust was established in 1936 and is an independent charity funding research to improve human and animal health. It is the UK's largest non-governmental source of funds for biomedical research.

Address: Gibbs Building, 215 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE.

Tel: 020 7611 8888

Fax 020 7611 8545

Email: contact@wellcome.ac.uk

Website: <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/>

Community Channel

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Web: <http://www.communitychannel.org/>

Tel: 08708 505500

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