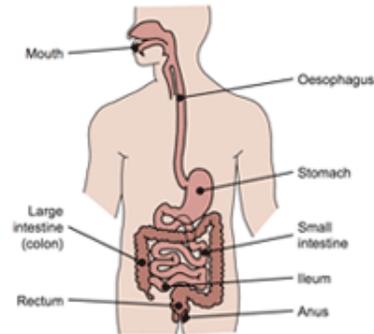


How does the digestive system work?

Your digestive system, or GI tract, is made up of several organs that together help your body take in food, break it down, distribute nutrients and get rid of waste.



The **upper GI tract** includes the **mouth, pharynx, oesophagus** and **stomach**. Food is taken in through the mouth, chewed and swallowed down past the pharynx, then passed down through the oesophagus and into the stomach.

The **lower GI tract** includes the **large intestine, small intestine** and **anus**. The small intestine has three parts: the **duodenum** (the first and shortest part of the small intestine, where most chemical digestion takes place), the **jejunum** (the middle part of the small intestine, largely responsible for absorption of nutrients), and the **ileum** (mainly responsible for absorbing vitamin B12, bile salts and other nutrients).

Activity time!

Click here (<http://artpad.art.com/artpad/painter/>) to draw a picture of your digestive system and colour it in. Do you know which part of your digestive system is affected by Crohn's disease? Show it to your doctor and ask him or her to circle the areas that are affected.

For parent information [click here](#)

This activity is designed to help your child understand the role of the digestive system and how Crohn's disease can affect the body. Talk to your child about the drawing and the different parts of the digestive system described in this section.

The large intestine includes the **caecum** (a pouch that connects the ileum to the large intestine, which aids in the breakdown of materials such as cellulose), colon (which removes water and salt and stores wastes) and rectum (the final part of the large intestine which serves as a storage area for waste).

The **anus** is the outer opening of the rectum and is mainly responsible for storing and getting rid of waste from the body.

Crohn's disease can affect any part of the digestive system, from the mouth to the anus. It affects only the small intestine in about 1/3 of people, both the small intestine and large intestine in about 1/3 of people, and only the large bowel in 1/3 of people. The inflammation (swelling) goes deep into the lining of the affected area, which can cause pain and can make the intestines empty often, leading to diarrhoea and an urge to go to the toilet often. There may be normal healthy bowel in between patches of diseased bowel.

Ulcerative colitis, in comparison, only affects the colon (large intestine) and also only affects the mucosa (lining) of the colon.

Here is a list of the different types of Crohn's disease and how they might affect you.

Ileocolitis: This is the most common form of Crohn's disease. It affects both the ileum and colon. Symptoms include diarrhoea and cramping or pain in the right lower part or middle of the abdomen. It often causes weight loss.

Ileitis: This only affects the ileum. Symptoms include diarrhoea, cramping or pain in the lower right or middle part of the abdomen.

Gastroduodenal Crohn's disease: This affects the stomach and duodenum (the first part of the small intestine). Symptoms may include weight loss, loss of appetite and nausea.

In severe Crohn's disease, complications may include fistulas (tunnels caused by inflammation) or inflammatory abscess (pockets of infection) in the right lower area of the abdomen.

In severe Gastrointestinal Crohn's disease vomiting may indicate a blockage in the intestine (an obstruction).

Jejunioileitis: This causes patchy areas of inflammation in the jejunum (upper half of the small intestine). Symptoms may include abdominal pain, ranging from mild to intense, and cramps following meals, as well as diarrhoea.

In severe jejunioileitis, complications may include fistulas.

Crohn's colitis: This affects the colon only. Symptoms may include diarrhoea, rectal bleeding, infections and disease around the anus, fistulas (tunnels caused by inflammation between different parts of the bowel, or between the bowel and the skin), inflammatory abscesses (pockets of infection), or ulcers (sores) on the skin. Skin problems and joint pains are more common with this form than with other forms of Crohn's disease.