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## Smoking

This information is for anyone who wants to know how smoking tobacco cigarettes may affect [Crohn's Disease](#), [Ulcerative Colitis](#) or [Microscopic Colitis](#). It also looks at e-cigarettes (vaping).

Everyone with Crohn's or Colitis is advised to stop smoking, especially if you need to have surgery. This information will help you find support to stop smoking.

There is not enough evidence to know how other tobacco products, such as shisha, affect Crohn's or Colitis. You can find out more about the health risks of other tobacco products on the [NHS website](#).

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## Key facts about smoking

- Everyone with Crohn's Disease, Ulcerative Colitis or Microscopic Colitis is advised not to smoke. Smoking has many harmful effects on your health.
- Smoking increases your risk of developing Crohn's Disease. Smoking can also make Crohn's worse.
- Smokers are less likely to develop Ulcerative Colitis than non-smokers. Stopping smoking increases your risk of developing Ulcerative Colitis.
- Smoking increases your risk of developing Microscopic Colitis.
- Cigarette smoke contains over 5,000 chemicals. Around 100 of these are known to be toxic or cause cancer. We don't know which chemicals in cigarette smoke affect Crohn's or Colitis. And we don't know how the chemicals in cigarette smoke affect Crohn's or Colitis.
- If you're having surgery for Crohn's or Colitis, your IBD team will recommend you stop smoking.
- Stopping smoking can be difficult. You're more likely to stop if you get support. The NHS offers local stop smoking services to help you stop successfully.

## Smoking and Crohn's Disease

Smoking increases your risk of developing Crohn's Disease.

However, we don't yet fully understand what causes Crohn's. Not everyone who smokes will develop Crohn's. And not everyone with Crohn's will have smoked.

The risk of developing Crohn's if you smoke may be linked to your ethnic background. But more research is needed to understand this link.

Smoking can also make Crohn's worse.

Smoking in Crohn's has been linked to:

- More severe disease and complications. These include strictures and perianal disease. A stricture is a narrowing in the bowel that can cause a dangerous blockage. Perianal disease is Crohn's around your bottom (anus).
- More [flare-ups](#).
- Needing more treatment with steroids, immunosuppressants and anti-TNF medicines.
- Needing your first [surgery](#) and then needing further surgery.
- Crohn's flaring-up again after surgery.
- Developing complications outside of the gut, such as [weak bones](#) and [joint problems](#). These are also called extraintestinal manifestations (EIMs).
- An increased risk of developing [bowel cancer](#).

**I have Crohn's Disease and I smoke. I have tried to give it up, but I find it really hard as it is part of my daily routine. My consultant always advises me of the detrimental effect it can have on my condition, which does make me think a bit more about giving up.**

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**Ann**

**Living with Crohn's**

## **How does smoking affect Crohn's?**

We don't know exactly what it is about smoking that affects Crohn's. Cigarette smoke contains over 5,000 chemicals. Around 100 of these are known to be toxic or cause cancer. Smoking could affect Crohn's by:

- Changing the bacteria that live in your gut.
- Changing the way your genes work.
- Changing your immune system.
- Making the lining of your gut more leaky. This could make it easier for bacteria or other foreign substances to pass into your blood and trigger an immune response.

## **Should I stop smoking?**

- UK guidelines strongly advise that people with Crohn's do not smoke.
- If you are having surgery for Crohn's your IBD team will recommend you stop smoking.

**I was a smoker for 30 years, but when I was diagnosed with Crohn's, my consultant advised me to give up. I tried, and managed to give up after a bowel resection operation.**

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**Carol**

**Living with Crohn's**

Giving up smoking is important for people with Crohn's. It's never too late to quit. If you stop smoking:

- Your risk of a flare-up is the same as a non-smoker.
- Your risk of needing surgery, or Crohn's flaring-up again after surgery is the same as a non-smoker.
- Your risk of getting complications outside the gut is the same as a non-smoker.

**I was a very heavy smoker, averaging 40 a day. Giving up smoking was the best thing I did – my Crohn's has improved so much.**

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**Jean**

**Living with Crohn's**

Even reducing how much you smoke may help with your Crohn's. People who smoke less have fewer complications outside the gut. They also have a lower risk of strictures than heavy smokers.

Stopping smoking can be difficult. You're more likely to stop if you get support. See the section on **Getting help to stop smoking** below.

## Smoking and Ulcerative Colitis

It may be surprising to hear that:

- Smokers are less likely to develop Ulcerative Colitis than non-smokers.
- Stopping smoking increases your risk of developing Ulcerative Colitis.

UK guidelines strongly advise that people with Ulcerative Colitis do not smoke. Smoking is one of the biggest causes of illness and death in the UK. You should not start smoking to try to help your Ulcerative Colitis.

It's not clear whether smoking changes Ulcerative Colitis. Some studies show that smokers have a milder form of Ulcerative Colitis. This includes fewer flare-ups, hospital admissions, and less need for steroids or immunosuppressants. But other studies find no difference between smokers and non-smokers with Ulcerative Colitis.

A colectomy is surgery to remove the colon. The risk of needing a colectomy is the same in smokers and non-smokers with Ulcerative Colitis. Ex-smokers with Ulcerative Colitis have a small increased risk of needing a colectomy compared to non-smokers.

### **How does smoking affect Ulcerative Colitis?**

We don't know exactly what it is about smoking that affects Ulcerative Colitis. Cigarette smoke contains over 5,000 chemicals. Around 100 of these are known to be toxic or cause cancer. Smoking could affect Ulcerative Colitis by:

- Changing the bacteria that live in your gut.
- Changing the way your genes work.
- Changing your immune system.
- Increasing mucus production in your colon.

## Nicotine replacement therapy for Ulcerative Colitis

Nicotine is an addictive chemical found in tobacco cigarettes.

Researchers can't do a clinical trial to see if smoking helps Ulcerative Colitis because of the harm cigarettes cause to the body. However nicotine is not toxic, so some studies have looked at the effects of nicotine replacement therapies (NRT) on Ulcerative Colitis. Studies on the impact of nicotine on Ulcerative Colitis have used nicotine patches, nicotine chewing gum or nicotine enemas.

NRT was more effective than the placebo (a dummy treatment with no nicotine) in getting people with Ulcerative Colitis into remission. NRT was as effective, but not better than standard medicines, such as [aminosalicylates \(5-ASAs\)](#) or [steroids](#), in getting people with Ulcerative Colitis into remission.

Unwanted side effects were common with NRT. Some people stopped their treatment with NRT early because of unwanted side effects.

Talk to your IBD team if you're thinking about trying NRT.

### Should I stop smoking?

It might be tempting to continue or even take up smoking to try to help your Ulcerative Colitis. But it's important to remember the many other harmful effects of smoking. Smoking is one of the biggest causes of illness and death in the UK.

- UK guidelines strongly advise that people with Ulcerative Colitis do not smoke.
- If you are having surgery for Ulcerative Colitis your IBD team will recommend you stop smoking.

You may be at risk of having a flare-up when you stop smoking. Your IBD team will work with you to come up with a treatment plan before you stop smoking. This way you can

feel more confident in controlling your symptoms if your Colitis is affected by stopping smoking.

Stopping smoking can be difficult. You're more likely to stop if you get support. See the section on **Getting help to stop smoking** below.

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## Passive smoking and Crohn's Disease or Ulcerative Colitis

### Passive smoking in babies and children

Passive smoking is breathing in someone else's cigarette smoke. It's also known as second-hand smoke.

It's not clear if passive smoking while you're in the womb or as a child affects your risk of developing Crohn's Disease or Ulcerative Colitis. Some research suggests your risk of Crohn's or Colitis is increased if you were exposed to cigarette smoke in the womb or as a child. But newer research has not found any increased risks from passive smoking in the womb or as a child.

- Smoking or passive smoking during pregnancy still carries other risks to you and your baby. See the NHS website for more on the [benefits of stopping smoking during pregnancy](#).
- Passive smoking is still dangerous for children. See the NHS website for more on the [risks of passive smoking in children](#).

### Passive smoking in adults

Some studies have looked at passive smoking in adults with Crohn's who have never smoked. In one study, adults exposed to passive smoking needed more medicines than those who had not been exposed to passive smoking. These medicines included immunosuppressants and [infliximab](#). In another study, adults exposed to passive



smoking were more likely to need surgery for their Crohn's than people who were not exposed to passive smoking.

Passive smoking does not affect the need for medicines, hospital admissions or surgery in adults with Ulcerative Colitis who have never smoked.

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## Smoking and Microscopic Colitis

**Smoking increases your risk of developing Microscopic Colitis.**

Compared with people who have never smoked, current smokers and ex-smokers have an increased risk of developing:

- Collagenous Colitis
- Lymphocytic Colitis

Smokers tend to develop Microscopic Colitis at an earlier age than non-smokers or ex-smokers. Most studies show that smoking does not affect symptoms, remission rates or the need for medicines in Microscopic Colitis.

**It's recommended that everyone with Microscopic Colitis does not smoke.**

More research is needed to know if stopping smoking can help Microscopic Colitis. But it's important to remember the many other harmful effects of smoking.

**Stopping smoking can be difficult. You're more likely to stop if you get support. See the section on [Getting help to stop smoking](#) below.**

## Getting help to stop smoking

Stopping smoking can be difficult. You might find it even harder to stop smoking if those around you smoke.

Your IBD team, GP or other healthcare professionals can support you to stop smoking. Some pharmacists, private health insurers and employers offer programmes to help you stop smoking.

The NHS offers support to help you stop smoking. You're three times more likely to stop smoking if you get expert support and use stop smoking treatments. Find the services that are local to you:

- [England](#)
- [Northern Ireland](#)
- [Scotland](#)
- [Wales](#)

Stop smoking treatments available on the NHS are:

- Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), such as patches, chewing gum, lozenges or inhalers.
- A medicine called bupropion (Zyban).

The [NHS website](#) has more information on stop smoking treatments, including:

- How to get stop smoking treatments
- Who they are suitable for
- Side effects of stop smoking treatments

**With the money I saved, I treated myself to a new laptop. I felt that it was important to treat myself in recognition of giving up what had been a major habit in my life.**

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**Carol**

**Living with Crohn's**

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## **Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes, vaping)**

Electronic cigarettes are also known as e-cigarettes or vapes. E-cigarettes allow you to inhale nicotine without smoking a cigarette. E-cigarettes are much less harmful than smoking tobacco cigarettes. Some potentially harmful substances are produced by e-cigarettes, but these are in much lower levels than cigarettes. Tar and carbon monoxide are two of the most harmful substances in cigarettes. E-cigarettes do not produce tar or carbon monoxide.

**E-cigarettes are not recommended for non-smokers.**

Not much is known about the impact of e-cigarettes on Crohn's and Colitis. Smoking e-cigarettes does not seem to make Crohn's or Colitis worse. But much more research is needed to confirm this.

E-cigarettes with nicotine are effective in helping people to quit smoking. They are more effective than other types of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). Unlike NRT, e-cigarettes are not available on prescription from the NHS. The NHS has more information on [using e-cigarettes to stop smoking](#).

## Other organisations

England

**Better Health - Quit smoking**

[www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/](http://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/)

Northern Ireland

**Stop smoking – Helping you to quit**

[www.stopsmokingni.info](http://www.stopsmokingni.info)

Scotland

**Quit Your Way**

[www.nhsinform.scot/quit-your-way-scotland](http://www.nhsinform.scot/quit-your-way-scotland)

Helpline: 0800 84 84 84

Wales

**Help Me Quit**

[www.helpmequit.wales](http://www.helpmequit.wales)

Helpline: 0800 085 2219

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## 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](http://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](mailto:helpline@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk).

See our website for LiveChat: [crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/livechat](https://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](https://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](https://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](https://crohnsandcolitis.org.uk).

## About our information

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.

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