BEING ACTIVE WITH CROHN'S OR COLITIS

It is not always easy to be physically active if you're living with Crohn's or Colitis. But being active is important for our physical and mental health. This information will help you to:

- Find out how exercise might affect Crohn's or Colitis
- Recognise the benefits of exercising
- Think about ways you can increase your physical activity
- Understand how to stay active after surgery or when living with a stoma

Staying active is important for everyone. But there is currently little evidence on how exercise might affect Microscopic Colitis. Most evidence on exercising with Inflammatory Bowel Disease looks at Crohn's Disease or Ulcerative Colitis. Where we use the term 'Colitis' in this information we are referring to Ulcerative Colitis.

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KEY FACTS ABOUT BEING ACTIVE WITH CROHN'S OR COLITIS

- Exercising with Crohn's or Colitis is safe and shouldn't cause a flare-up.
- Being active can help reduce fatigue and improve mental wellbeing.
- Adults should try to do 150 minutes (two and a half hours) of moderate intensity exercise every week.
- You should avoid strenuous exercise for at least the first 4-6 weeks after an operation. After that build your activity levels up slowly.
- Belts and girdles can help support tummy muscles if exercising with a stoma.

BEING ACTIVE

It is not always easy to be physically active if you're living with Crohn's or Colitis. But being active is important for our physical and mental health. It is safe to be

physically active or to exercise with Crohn's or Colitis. Current research suggests it does not cause flare-ups.

You might find it difficult to be active if your Crohn's or Colitis is severe. Symptoms like tummy or joint pain, fatigue, or urgently needing to poo can get in the way. For some people, being active can trigger these symptoms. But most people with Crohn's or Colitis say exercising makes them feel better. Some said they have more energy, better sleep and fewer gut symptoms.

Being active can improve mental wellbeing and quality of life, as well as reducing fatigue. Being active may also have positive effects on your condition, such as reducing the risk of a flare-up. Scientists believe regular exercise could help reduce inflammation in Crohn's or Colitis. This has been seen in other long-term illnesses, but more research is needed to know for sure.

Most research on exercise has involved people in remission or with mildly active Crohn's or Colitis, who were doing low or moderate intensity activities. Moderate intensity exercise is when your heart rate increases and you can talk, but not sing. Examples include brisk walking or cycling.

Higher intensity exercise is when you breathe harder and cannot say more than a few words without pausing for breath. Examples include running, aerobics or playing football. We do not know much about higher intensity exercise in people with Crohn's or Colitis. But early research shows it can be safe and enjoyable.

UK guidelines recommend that adults try to do:

- At least 150 minutes (two and a half hours) of moderate intensity activity every week, including:
- Muscle strengthening exercises on two or more days a week that work all the major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms)

This includes older adults and those who are pregnant or disabled. There are no specific recommendations for exercising with Crohn's or Colitis. It will probably depend on how active your condition is and your symptoms at the time.

If you're not very active or your symptoms are making it difficult, try to build up your activity levels slowly. Walk to the shops instead of taking the car, use the stairs instead of the lift. Even sitting down less during the day can help. But be kind to yourself. If you're not feeling up to it, don't put pressure on yourself.

If you're struggling to increase your physical activity, talk to your IBD team or GP. They may be able to suggest ideas to help you, based on your personal situation.

EXERCISE FOLLOWING SURGERY

Having surgery for Crohn's or Colitis can be a shock to your body, mentally and physically. You may find our pages on **surgery for Crohn's Disease** and **surgery for Ulcerative Colitis** useful.

Following any surgery, you will be encouraged to move as much as you can. To begin with this may mean getting out of bed into a chair, followed by slowly walking. It is normal to feel your wound stretch when you stand up to walk. You should avoid any strenuous exercise for at least a few weeks after your surgery. This includes housework and lifting anything heavier than a full kettle for at least the first four to six weeks. This is so your wounds can heal properly. If you've had a stoma surgery, you may need to wait longer before lifting anything heavy. Ask your stoma nurse or surgical team for advice specific to you.

In the meantime, you can try gentle chair and standing exercises. Exercise should not cause pain, although it might be uncomfortable. Start slowly and increase your activity as you feel able. You should aim to be able to walk 30 minutes a day two to three months after your operation.

Having major abdominal surgery affects the muscles in the tummy. This in turn affects your core stability. Core stability is important for balance and good posture. Core stability exercises can help prevent tummy pain, backache and hernias. Hernias are bulges under the skin which happen if the gut pushes through gaps in muscles. Hernias are more likely to form after surgery.

The York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals have produced a **leaflet** with some examples of core stability exercises you could try.

Swimming

Your surgical team, IBD team or GP can advise you when it is safe for you to go swimming. This may depend on the type of surgery you've had and what type of swimming you would like to do. There is some information on **swimming after surgery** on the NHS website which may be helpful.

EXERCISING WITH A STOMA

Having a stoma should not stop you doing the exercise you enjoy. In fact, many people find they can go back to doing the things they used to before their operation. Once you have recovered from surgery, your stoma nurse might give you exercises to build up your tummy muscles and prevent hernias.

Build up the amount of exercise you do gradually. Do not rush or expect too much of yourself too quickly. For heavier activities, you could wear a belt or girdle to support your stoma and tummy muscles. Your stoma nurse can tell you when you can start playing contact sports again.

Read our information on **living with a stoma** for more support and information.

Swimming

Stoma bags are waterproof so you can go swimming if you want to. You can get filter covers to stop the filters getting wet. Some people like to use a smaller stoma

bag when swimming. If you want to cover up your stoma bag, you can buy covers in different colours and patterns. You can also get swimwear that is specially designed for people who have a stoma.

Colostomy UK have more information in their booklet: **Active Ostomates- Sport and fitness after stoma surgery.**

PROTEIN SUPPLEMENTS

Some people like to take protein supplements, such as protein shakes, as part of their exercise routine. There is not much evidence on the effect of protein supplements in people with Crohn's or Colitis. Some research suggests whey protein may help with gut inflammation. But other evidence suggests a diet too high in protein can cause a flare-up. Protein supplements are highly processed and contain a lot of ingredients. Some of these might cause side effects if you take them for a long time. If you can, it's better to get protein from food rather than supplements. This also helps you get other nutrients your body needs. Protein rich foods include eggs, cheese, meat, fish and pulses. If you choose to use protein supplements, check the ingredients. Different supplements contain different sources of protein, such as dairy versus plant based. Choose one that is suitable for you. For example, if dairy makes your symptoms worse avoid dairy based proteins, such as whey. Follow the instructions on the packet and mix the supplement with the right amount of water.

Read our **Food** resource for more information on how to eat well with Crohn's or Colitis.

SPORTS STARS WITH CROHN'S OR COLITIS

There are lots of successful sports personalities who have Crohn's or Colitis. You can find out more about our sports ambassadors **here**.

YOUR TOP TIPS

Here are some tips from people living with Crohn's or Colitis about exercising well with these conditions.

"I walk or run depending upon how I feel. My tip is not to put pressure on yourself if you are in flare-up. My other tip is to find an activity you enjoy, as you are more likely to do it."

"Listen to your body! Some days the no inside your brain is lack of motivation, other days it's a NO you're not able to do this today, it'll cause more harm than good. And that's okay. Look after yourself."

"If I'm on the edge of a flare-up or having a bad day with multiple symptoms, intense exercise (running / team sports / HIIT classes etc) can tip me over the edge. That said, prioritising movement, no matter how small, is key to keeping myself well day to day."

"Whatever you do is better than doing nothing. Keeping fit has helped me to fight my condition and lead a full life. Sometimes the hardest step is the first one. You've got this."

"Think about hydration! It can be easy to get dehydrated so hydrating properly before, after and during a marathon or long distance event is key."

"When I go to a class, with lots of people, I like to tell the instructor, in private, that I have Colitis. This gives me a bit of peace of mind, because if I need to leave for the toilet, the instructor knows why. I also give plenty of time, after a meal, to go to the toilet before hitting the gym, so I don't get anxious while at it. But most of all, I focus on activities I really enjoy, so the excitement of the class overcomes any anxiety and toilet needs, which can be triggered by it. And be kind to yourself. If you need to stop an activity to use the toilet, don't feel bad or embarrassed, we are just human and probably no one will notice you're struggling."

"We are strong mentally with what we deal with day to day and training has so much to do with mental toughness, so we are already winning."

"Try to find an activity that offers a physical reward as well as mental. Bouldering is a fantastic problem-solving sport that helps to improve mental wellbeing as well as offering a great all round workout!"

FINDING SERVICES

There are lots of different ways to be active. And it's important to remember that exercising does not have to be expensive. Going to your local park or following a YouTube video are great and free ways to build movement into your day. Your local leisure centre may have details of exercise classes or local sports clubs that you could join. To find sports facilities near you there is a national search tool for England on the **NHS website**. Choose 'find other services'. Then select 'sports and fitness services' and enter your postcode.

Some councils have local schemes for people with long-term conditions. You may also find it useful to search online for accessible and disability sports in your local area. You can check what's available at your local leisure centre, community centre or council here:

Find your local Active Partnership (England only)

Find your local council (GOV.UK)

OTHER ORGANISATIONS

NHS Get Active

https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/get-active/

NHS Live Well

https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/exercise-guidelines/

NHS Physiotherapy

https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/physiotherapy/

Sport England

https://www.sportengland.org/jointhemovement#get_active_at_home

Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Association – Exercise for Ostomates

https://iasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Exercise.pdf

We Are Undefeatable (Supporting people with long term health conditions to be active)

https://weareundefeatable.co.uk/

Activity Alliance (A national charity and leading voice for disabled people in sport and activity)

https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/

Scope (disability equality charity)

https://www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/disability-sport/

The Ramblers (Britain's walking charity)

https://www.ramblers.org.uk/

Paths for All (Scotland's network of walking for health groups)

https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/

Walking for Health groups NI

https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/walking-health-groups-health-and-social-care-trusts

Walk NI (interactive map of walking trails in Northern Ireland)

https://www.walkni.com/

HELP AND SUPPORT FROM CROHN'S & COLITIS UK

We're here for you. Our information covers a wide range of topics. From treatment options to symptoms, relationship concerns to employment issues, our information can help you manage your condition. We'll help you find answers, access support and take control.

All information is available on our **website**.

Helpline service

Our helpline team provides up-to-date, evidence-based information. You can find out more on our **helpline web page.** Our team can support you to live well with Crohn's or Colitis.

Our Helpline team can provide support by:

- Providing information about Crohn's and Colitis
- Listening and talking through your situation
- Helping you to find support from others in the Crohn's and Colitis community
- Providing details of other specialist organisations

You can call the Helpline on **0300 222 5700**. Or visit our **LiveChat service**. You can read our information on **when the Helpline** is open for more details..

You can email **helpline@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk** at any time. The Helpline will aim to respond to your email within three working days.

Our helpline also offers a language interpretation service, which allows us to speak to callers in their preferred language.

Virtual Social Events

We offer people affected by Crohn's or Colitis the chance to join a virtual social event with others across the UK. The events will be a chance to chat, share experiences and potentially learn from others. Each event may have a specific topic but the overall discussion will be driven by what those attending wish to talk about.

Family, friends and colleagues are more than welcome to attend.

Visit our **Virtual Social Events** page to find out what is available.

Crohn's & Colitis UK Forum

This closed-group Facebook community is for anyone affected by Crohn's or Colitis. You can share your experiences and receive support from others. Find out more about the **Crohn's & Colitis UK Forum.**

Help with toilet access when out

There are many benefits to becoming a member of Crohn's & Colitis UK. One of these is a free RADAR key to unlock accessible toilets. Another is a Can't Wait Card. This card shows that you have a medical condition. It will help when you are out and need urgent access to the toilet. See **our membership webpage** for more information. Or you can call the Membership Team on **01727 734465**.

ABOUT CROHN'S & COLITIS UK

We're Crohn's & Colitis UK and we're changing what it means to live with these lifelong gut conditions. 1 in 123 people in the UK have Crohn's Disease or Ulcerative Colitis. These are unpredictable conditions that could flare up at any time.

No one should face that alone. That's where we can help.

We provide trusted information and support cutting-edge research. We also lead bold campaigns to get more people talking about Crohn's and Colitis. We help

people understand these conditions, give them the attention they deserve and bring people together to create change.

This year, 25,000 people will be told they have Crohn's or Colitis. Once diagnosed, the obstacles continue. Today, there is no cure. People simply don't understand these conditions. So, we have listened. It's time for change & we're leading the way.

Our information is available thanks to the generosity of our supporters and members. Find out how you can join the fight against Crohn's and Colitis by calling **01727 734465.** Or you can visit **our website**.

About our information

We follow strict processes to make sure our information is based on up-to-date evidence and is easy to understand. We produce it with patients, medical advisers and other professionals. It is not intended to replace advice from your own healthcare professional.

You can find out more on **our website**.

We hope that you've found this information helpful. Please email us at **evidence@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk** if:

- You have any comments or suggestions for improvements
- You would like more information about the evidence we use
- 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 you can contact us through the **Helpline** on **0300 222 5700**.

We do not endorse any products mentioned in our information.

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