

Arthritis and the Intestines

Arthritis is the most common non-intestinal condition associated with Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis. Although most people with these diseases do not develop arthritis, three primary kinds may develop, namely:

- ❖ Rheumatoid like arthritis
- ❖ Ankylosing Spondylitis
- ❖ Large joint arthritis

The first form of arthritis mimics rheumatoid arthritis in many ways. It usually involves the wrists and fingers and may improve or worsen without regard to the course of the bowel disease. Sometimes people with this form of arthritis have an antibody in the blood called **rheumatoid factor**, which is found in persons who have rheumatoid arthritis. Not all people with the rheumatoid like arthritis have this antibody, however **Ankylosing Spondylitis** is a condition that involves the lower part of the spine and adjacent joints. In addition to pain, it may cause stiffening of the spine, hips, neck, jaw and rib cage. Its course depends is independent of the course of the underlying bowel disease. As time goes on, the condition may get better or worsen and on occasions, it may develop even after the bowel disease has been removed or has improved. The disease usually commences before age 30. **Large joint arthritis** usually effects the knees, ankles, hips and occasionally the elbows and shoulders. The small joints of the hands and feet and the spine are not usually involved. Unlike other kinds of arthritis, this form often worsens as the bowel disease worsens and improves as the disease improves. It sometimes worsens before the bowel activates. This arthritis does not leave permanent joint deformities. We do not know what causes these three forms of arthritis that develop with either Crohn's Disease or Ulcerative Colitis. Many physicians have attributed the arthritis to some immunologic process, which may accompany the in intestinal disease, but convincing evidence for this is still lacking.

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