



*yoga  
Wellness*

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# **YOGA FOR CROHN'S DISEASE**



Crohn's Disease is a non-infectious, autoimmune inflammatory bowel disease of uncertain origin. It causes inflammation, stricturing (narrowing) and penetrating (the creation of abnormal routes) in the digestive tract lining. The disease is often debilitating and at its worse can threaten life. It occurs in the ileum (end of the small intestine) and large intestine. There are three types of Crohn's which vary according to locality within the intestines, although it is possible for it to occur elsewhere within the digestive tract (often the anus and sometimes the stomach), which runs from the mouth to the anus. Currently there exists no 'medical cure', yet there are many individuals who have found their own, following great research and effort. The disease incorporates flare-ups followed by remissions. The infection which erodes the intestinal wall, affects approximately thirty thousand (USA) and six thousand (UK) new patients a year. There may be some genetic bearing in its contraction and it tends to affect people in their teens to twenties or in their fifties to seventies. The disease has a wide symptomatic range where these often occur outside of the intestines. Although modern medicines and surgery play an important role in combating the disease, it often reoccurs following surgery. It is believed that the condition may follow a virus, whereby the autoimmune defences overact, destroying harmless bacteria and mucosa, aggravating the system rather than promoting regeneration.

## CAUSES

Stress is likely to be one of the causes of this excessive reaction within the nervous system. It is also possible that the long term ingestion of acidic fatty diets play a role in its inception. There is a negative spiral, whereby after colonic function is impaired, the body finds it increasingly difficult to absorb essential nutrients. This is worsened by incorrect food combinations (including excessive animal and milk proteins, wheat, yeast, caffeine, smoking and alcohol) which further acidify the intestines rather than calm them. Difficulties arise when undigested foods produce unattended toxins which eventually result in chronic inflammation. Once the disease has taken root, the stomach overproduces acid, retarding digestion and stress gets knotted in the guts leading to instability by way of constipation or irritability.

## SYMPTOMS

Crohn's symptoms include abdominal pain, cramps, constipation, diarrhoea, blood in stools, ulcers, malabsorption, vomiting, fever, weight loss, arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, skin problems, anal sores and abscesses, tongue and cheek mouth ulcers, fatigue, night sweats, diabetes and growth failure in children.

## HOW CAN YOGA HELP?

In Ayurveda, the science of longevity, inflammatory diseases are due to imbalance of pitta (fire and water) and its relationship with vata (space, air) and kapha (water, earth). The pitta humor corresponds with bile which is acidic and when overabundant becomes aggressive. Yoga practice seeks to instigate harmony and so postures, breathing and meditations which facilitate

calming pitta are applied. If one is able to gradually adopt regular practice, starting with once a week upwards, this will naturally adjust tastes in diet, pastimes, thinking and belief systems. This promotes a strong opportunity to heal Crohn's Disease partially and in some cases, completely.

Crohn's sufferers experience a remission stage during which the intestines constipate. During this period practice may include positions and breathing to encourage peristalsis to return to 'normal' so the system can flush again. If a Crohn's patient is seeking a long term cure then it goes without saying that lifetime changes are required. It is important to implement them gradually and with self-love, to optimise instillation of long term yoga practice. Yoga has this amazing ability to help the body-mind discriminate between good and bad foods, prompting us to avoid the wrong ones. An effective yoga practice boosts digestive power, absorption and elimination, and tastes for alcohol and smoking diminish as well as increasing awareness of the importance of restorative sleep, rather than a few hours of light and restless dreaming. Probiotics (friendly bacteria) are recommended, for diarrhoea and constipation, assisting the gut in maintaining immunity during very challenging times. There are many dietary options which one must experiment with until the most advantageous permutations are ascertained. One of the main difficulties with Crohn's disease is the digestive system's inability to absorb nutrients, making the right food choices very important. Anything triggering stress and the overproduction of adrenalin and cortisol, reduces immunity and increases acidity.





Study can be carried out to determine and avoid foods digested by acid, opting for those digested by enzymes. Study yogic and Ayurvedic diets, seeking recipes to make the body more alkaline. This fosters remission periods and creates the space for a positive practice cycle to unfold. Dramatic changes take place quickly when the right dietary mix is found. It is common to avoid yeast and dairy and opt for whole and freshly cooked foods, pomegranate juice and honey. Careful research into fasts and their application may be useful in eliminating toxins and must be applied cautiously to avoid depleting the body of nutrition.

If you are used to eating meat, eggs and fish, potatoes, bread, pasta and rice, it is important to take care with

dietary shifts, especially if you are underweight. Implement pulses, nuts, dried fruits and seeds gradually, and if they don't agree with you try lower fibre cereals, fruit and vegetables. The palate needs time to adapt to new flavours and will be inspired when you see the benefits of avoiding aggravating substances. Sufficient iron and calcium are essential and if in doubt visit a dietician for assistance.

## TAKE LOTS OF REST.

This is essential. Sleep is the natural healer providing cellular regeneration. The medical profession currently state there is no cure for Crohn's Disease. They told me the same about my asthma 38 years ago. I'm glad I decided to be my own physician and find my own remedy. I'd call it Grace, which gives us the energy to find solutions against all odds. Yoga practice affects each layer of our being and commences with an intention, such as healing. Asanas,

pranayama and meditation affect the subtle layers and vital centres, gradually filtering into the physical body. Overactive adrenals (endocrine glands) require homeostasis and in applying the correct practices, circulation increases, swelling in the abdomen reduces and vitality improves. This may include an increased need to rest at the onset of the journey. The deeper insight that grows with practice, cultivates the unbending intent required to support us, especially when we slip back a little. Somewhere within, we all know there's a point at which we need to question life in order to experience its deeper meanings.

### Next month

Yoga for Crohn's Disease Part 2 – recommended remedial practices.

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