

# Ulcerative Colitis

## What Is Ulcerative Colitis?

Ulcerative colitis (UC) is a type of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) that causes inflammation and ulcers in the lining of your large intestine (colon) and rectum. This long-term condition can lead to a range of symptoms, which may flare up periodically and then go into remission. At Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic, we specialise in diagnosing and managing ulcerative colitis, providing expert care tailored to your needs.

## What Causes Ulcerative Colitis?

The exact cause of ulcerative colitis is not fully understood, but it is believed to be related to:

- **Immune system response:** An abnormal immune reaction may cause your body to attack healthy tissue in the colon, leading to inflammation.
- **Genetics:** Having a family history of ulcerative colitis may increase your risk.
- **Environmental triggers:** Stress, infections, and diet may contribute to flare-ups, although they are not direct causes.

Ulcerative colitis is not caused by anything you've done, and it's important to remember that effective treatments are available to help manage the condition.

## What Are The Symptoms Of Ulcerative Colitis?

Symptoms of ulcerative colitis can vary in severity and may include:

- Diarrhoea, often with blood or mucus
- Abdominal pain or cramping, usually in the lower left side
- Urgency to have a bowel movement
- Fatigue and low energy
- Unintentional weight loss
- Anaemia (low red blood cell count) caused by bleeding
- Loss of appetite

In severe cases, you may experience fever or dehydration. Symptoms often occur in cycles, with periods of flare-ups followed by times of remission.

## When To Seek Urgent Medical Advice

You should seek medical attention immediately if you experience:

- Severe abdominal pain that does not improve
- Persistent diarrhoea with blood
- Fever alongside digestive symptoms
- Significant weight loss or signs of dehydration
- Symptoms of anaemia, such as pale skin or shortness of breath

These symptoms may indicate a severe flare-up or complications, such as toxic megacolon or perforation of the colon, which require prompt treatment.

## How Is Ulcerative Colitis Diagnosed?

At Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic, we use advanced diagnostic tools to confirm a diagnosis of ulcerative colitis and assess its severity. These may include:

- **Colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy:** A thin, flexible tube with a camera is used to examine the lining of your colon and rectum. Biopsies (small tissue samples) may be taken during the procedure.
- **Blood tests:** To check for signs of inflammation, anaemia, or infection.
- **Stool tests:** To rule out infections or detect markers of inflammation.
- **Imaging tests:** CT or MRI scans may be used to assess complications or the extent of inflammation.

Early and accurate diagnosis is crucial for effective treatment and long-term management.

## How Is Ulcerative Colitis Treated?

While there is no cure for ulcerative colitis, treatment focuses on reducing inflammation, relieving symptoms, and maintaining remission. Options may include:

- **Medications:**
  - Aminosalicylates (5-ASAs) to reduce inflammation in the bowel
  - Corticosteroids for short-term use during flare-ups
  - Immunosuppressants to control your immune response
  - Biologic therapies to target specific proteins involved in inflammation
- **Dietary adjustments:** A dietitian may recommend avoiding certain foods during flare-ups and ensuring balanced nutrition
- **Surgery:** In severe cases where medication is not effective, surgery may be needed to remove part or all of the colon (colectomy)

Your consultant will work closely with you to develop a personalised treatment plan based on your symptoms and overall health.

## Living With Ulcerative Colitis

With the right management plan, many people with ulcerative colitis can lead full and active lives. Key steps include:

- Regular monitoring and follow-ups to assess your condition.
- Maintaining a balanced diet and staying hydrated.
- Managing stress, as it can trigger flare-ups.
- Joining support groups or counselling to help cope with the emotional challenges of living with a chronic condition.

## Why Choose Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic?

At Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic, we specialise in diagnosing and treating ulcerative colitis with state-of-the-art technology and a compassionate approach. Our team of experienced gastroenterologists provides expert care and personalised treatment plans to help you manage your symptoms effectively.

## Contact Us

If you are experiencing symptoms of ulcerative colitis or need support managing your condition, contact Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic today to book a consultation. Early diagnosis and tailored care can make a significant difference in improving your quality of life and helping you regain control of your health.