

# Enteropathic Arthritis & You

## What is it?



Enteropathic arthritis is a type of arthritis that occurs with inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD) such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease. It usually affects the joints of the lower limbs and the spine. It can also cause debilitating body aches.

Enteropathic arthritis can be referred to as arthritis associated with IBD. Not all patients with IBD have joint problems.



### Treatment of enteropathic arthritis must consider the whole patient

Interconnection is part of the Yin and Yang concept in Chinese philosophy. With enteropathic arthritis, the bowel disease and arthritis can be interconnected in many different ways. For some, joints can flare at the same time as bowel disease flares. For others, a flare in the joints can be a sign of worsening disease in the bowels. Controlling one element of the disease can sometimes help with the other. The key is to treat the whole person, not just the individual symptoms. This can be best achieved through collaboration between a rheumatologist and a gastroenterologist.

## What is it going to do to me?



The symptoms of enteropathic arthritis can be very different for each person. The most common form of the disease causes aches all over the body. There are no swollen joints, but the pain can be debilitating. It is similar to a disease called fibromyalgia. Sometimes the achingness can improve if the bowel disease is treated.

In other people enteropathic arthritis causes inflammation of the spine and the sacroiliac joints (the joints between the spine and the pelvis). This causes a stiff, sore back that can be debilitating. Controlling the IBD may not improve the back pain and stiffness.

Enteropathic arthritis can affect joints such as the ankles, knees, hips, wrists and elbows. This presentation can cause acute (quick onset) pain, warmth, and swelling in the joints. Flares of joint pain often happen around the same time the bowel disease flares. Sometimes, there can be more chronic (long-term) arthritis. It can affect multiple joints including the knees, ankles, elbows, shoulders, wrists or knuckles.

## Visit RheumInfo.com



RheumInfo.com is a free educational website where you can learn more about enteropathic arthritis and treatments for the disease. The website is operated by Dr. Andy Thompson, a rheumatologist.

## What can I do about it?



The first thing is don't panic. Take a deep breath. Although you might have been diagnosed with enteropathic arthritis, you are not alone. Luckily, there are effective treatments available that can make living with the condition more comfortable. If you have enteropathic arthritis or think you may have it, your family doctor should refer you to an arthritis specialist called a rheumatologist. To help manage your bowel disease, you might need to see a gastroenterologist – a specialist in diseases of the gastrointestinal system.

The earlier you treat enteropathic arthritis, the better. It is important to manage your bowel disease and to keep it under control. In some cases, this can help reduce symptoms of body aches and pain.

For acute attacks of the joints, corticosteroids can be very effective for reducing pain and swelling. These can be taken orally as pills (prednisone) or as cortisone injections directly into a joint.

Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs or NSAIDs are medications that can reduce joint inflammation and pain. However, NSAIDs can cause flaring of bowel disease in about 1 in 5 patients.

If the arthritis is more chronic, Disease Modifying Anti-Rheumatic Drugs (DMARDs) such as methotrexate or sulfasalazine can be effective. Anti-TNF biologics can also be effective for this type of arthritis. When there is spinal or sacroiliac inflammation, the best options are often anti-TNF biologics and/or NSAIDs.

Here are some other recommendations:

- **Learn as much as you can about the disease**
- **Attend your rheumatologist and/or gastroenterologist appointments regularly**
- **Learn about the medications used to treat enteropathic arthritis**