

Young people with Crohn's and colitis need more mental health support

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Credit: University of Manchester

New research has found that young people who experience severe Crohn's and colitis symptoms are more likely to experience poor mental health, and need extra support as a result.

Professor Pam Qualter from The University of Manchester, Professor Bernie Carter from Edge Hill University and their team asked 130 young people who have Crohn's or colitis—the two main forms of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) - about their feelings of depression, anxiety, loneliness, friendship quality, and embarrassment.

They found that experiencing more [severe symptoms](#), such as stomach pain, was related to developing [mental health problems](#)

Essentially, their research shows that an unpredictable bout of disease activity—such as a flare—causes anxiety and embarrassment about symptoms like pain, belly noises, incontinence

and/or need to rush to the toilet. This leads to not wanting to take part in [social activities](#) and this can lead to loneliness and poor mental [health](#).

The team hope that this study will increase the recognition of this problem and open up more opportunities for young people with Crohn's or colitis to talk about their mental health in clinic. This would provide them with clinical support to address the challenges associated with Crohn's and colitis, including the impact it has on social activities and mental health.

"Our findings shine a light on aspects of Crohn's and colitis that are of importance to young people, but which may be overlooked in clinic visits," said Professor Carter. "Typically, consultations do not address [young people's](#) feelings, mental health, or the challenges that these conditions can create for sustaining friendships and connectedness. While the focus on [physical symptoms](#) is important, our study reveals the importance of creating opportunities for talking about well-being and mental health."

"While it was not a surprise to find that mental health challenges were common among adolescents and young adults with IBD, we found that those were brought about because of the embarrassment surrounding the condition and the perceived negative impact symptoms had on friendships," said Professor Qualter. "It seems important, then, that patients have opportunities to discuss their mental health within their usual clinics, and that sustained friendships with peers are encouraged. In addition, our findings highlight the need to increase awareness of Crohn's and colitis, increasing the scope for compassion and understanding among youth."

The team's next steps include developing information sheets for parents of adolescents and [young adults](#) with Crohn's or colitis—these aim to help support them in engaging in open and honest

discussion about their conditions.

Provided by University of Manchester

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