



Sexuality and the IBD teen

When searching the internet for information on teen sexuality and IBD, it can be difficult to find clear advice on the topic. Dr. Mary Zachos, a pediatric gastroenterologist at McMaster Children's Hospital, has offered up some insightful advice for teen IBD patients and their parents, addressing commonly asked questions.

Dr. Zachos, does IBD affect puberty?

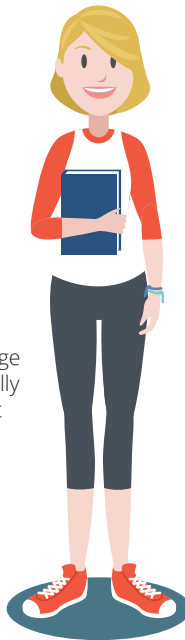
Active IBD can delay puberty in the same way it can have effects on growth. In some people, the main manifestation of disease activity is its effect on growth and pubertal development, and gastrointestinal symptoms are minimal. Therefore, in addition to reviewing symptoms and having tests such as blood work, stool analysis, imaging and endoscopy/colonoscopy, an important part of monitoring IBD is keeping a close eye on pubertal development.

What are most teens afraid of when it comes to their sexuality?

Teens are often concerned about how their IBD might impact their ability to attract a partner and have an intimate relationship. Those who are in a relationship might find it difficult to talk about their disease. It can be very helpful to speak to your doctor about any worries you have. Getting answers to important questions that arise during the teenage years can alleviate many concerns.

Do IBD medications affect body image?

Most medications we currently use to treat IBD do not change how a person looks. However, corticosteroids are occasionally used and can cause temporary side effects, including weight gain, acne or increased hair growth. These effects can be distressing for a teenager.



Do certain medications affect sex drive?

Many teens ask if their IBD medications will impact their sex drive, and they do not. However, some medications can decrease energy levels - as can active disease symptoms. Consequently, the desire for sex might be reduced.

Does an ostomy impact body image and sexual functioning?

Even healthy teens can lack confidence in their looks, and although an ostomy itself does not impact sexual functioning, having an ostomy or surgical scar can make a person feel even more insecure. Your healthcare team and ostomy nurse can offer good advice to help you manage the ostomy apparatus during intimacy.

How should parents approach the topic of sex?

"A parent should aim to create open lines of communication and approachability about all aspects of life, including school, relationships and behaviours. This will make it easier to have the same openness about sexuality. This communication needs to begin in early childhood and continue in a positive, non-judgmental and trustworthy fashion, so your teen with IBD will feel comfortable approaching you, or a healthcare team member with questions about sex."

Are there any risks with respect to sex and IBD?

All teens - whether they have IBD or not - take on certain risks when they have sex, including contracting a sexually transmitted infection (STI), becoming pregnant or making someone else pregnant. However, these can have greater consequences in people with IBD. For example, some IBD medications affect the immune system and STIs can therefore be more severe in people with IBD. In addition, certain medications are not safe for fetal development and should be strictly avoided if there is any risk of pregnancy. Young women should also consider being vaccinated against HPV, a sexually transmitted virus that can increase the risk of cervical cancer.

Can a person with IBD have a normal sex life?

Just because you have IBD does not mean you cannot have a healthy sex life, you can! However, you might just not feel well enough to be interested in sex during flares. Some types of IBD can affect the area around the vagina or anal canal with a fistula or abscess, which can make sex uncomfortable or even painful. Although you might be awkward talking about such things, it can be very helpful to speak to your healthcare team about any discomfort or worries regarding sex.

Dr. Mary Zachos is a Pediatric Gastroenterologist in the departments of Hepatology and Nutrition at McMaster Children's Hospital in Hamilton, Ontario.

ROBBIE'S RAINBOW MISSION

Our mission is to help improve the health and quality of life of children and teens living with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis (IBD).

We are committed to helping guide and support IBD families, teens and children by providing access to critical treatments and care, building educational resources and patient advocacy.



Help us help kids living with IBD.
DONATE TODAY
www.RobbiesRainbow.ca



View digital magazine



Check us out on Facebook:
RobbiesRainbowCa



Follow us on Twitter:
@RobbiesRainbow