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Fertility, pregnancy, and nursing in inflammatory bowel disease

Authors
Mark A Peppercorn, MD
Uma Mahadevan, MD

Section Editors
Paul Rutgeerts, MD, PhD, FRCP
Charles J Lockwood, MD, MHCM

Deputy Editor
Shilpa Grover, MD, MPH

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INTRODUCTION — Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) can affect women in their childbearing years and therefore has implications on fertility, pregnancy, and nursing.

This topic will review issues related to fertility in patients with IBD and the diagnosis and management of IBD in pregnant and nursing women. The medical management of IBD in the general population is discussed in detail separately. (See "Management of mild to moderate ulcerative colitis" and "Management of severe ulcerative colitis" and "Approach to adults with steroid-refractory and steroid-dependent ulcerative colitis" and "Overview of the medical management of mild to moderate Crohn disease in adults".)

FERTILITY — Patients with quiescent inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) do not have decreased fertility as compared with the age-matched general population [1-5]. Low birth rates among women with IBD are often due to patient choice rather than disease-related infertility [1,4]. (See "Overview of infertility".)

However, IBD can cause infertility in the following circumstances:

- Active inflammation in women with Crohn disease may result in infertility due to inflammation involving the fallopian tubes and ovaries [5]. Perianal disease can also cause dyspareunia. (See "Causes of female infertility", section on 'Fallopian tube abnormalities/pelvic adhesions'.)
- Medications may decrease fertility in men. As examples, methotrexate and sulfasalazine can cause reversible oligospermia. In addition, sulfasalazine is also associated with reduced sperm motility and abnormal sperm morphology [6-8].
- Surgery may impact fertility in patients with IBD. Proctocolectomy in men may lead to impotence or ejaculatory difficulties [9]. Restorative proctocolectomy with ileoanal anastomosis has been associated with dyspareunia and a reduction in fertility due to scarring and formation of adnexal adhesions [2,10,11]. (See "Surgical management of ulcerative colitis", section on 'Types of surgical procedures based upon clinical setting' and "Operative management of Crohn disease of the small bowel and colon", section on 'Operative management'.)

PRECONCEPTION COUNSELING — Preconception counseling offers an opportunity for the clinician to address specific patient concerns regarding the risk of transmission of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) to their offspring, to