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Diet and lifestyle as triggers for ulcerative colitis: patient perception

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Studies on diet and lifestyle as triggers for symptoms associated with ulcerative colitis have produced conflicting results^(1–3). In light of this outcome, guidelines for patients remain unclear.

The aim of the present study was to identify symptom triggers in patients with ulcerative colitis. Ethical approval was obtained from The London South Bank Research Ethics Committee. Patients were recruited from the Surrey regional group of the National Association of Colitis and Crohn's UK. A total of twenty-nine patients with a firm diagnosis of ulcerative colitis >5 years and having more than one relapse were recruited. Nine males of mean age 46.2 (range 28–61) years and mean BMI of 25.5 (range 21.4–33.3) kg/m² and twenty females of mean age 50.1 (range 27–73) years and mean BMI of 23.8 (range 18.8–35.5) kg/m² completed a postal questionnaire on symptoms and triggers of ulcerative colitis.

Trigger factors	Male (n 9)		Female (n 20)	
	n	%	n	%
Stress	6	66	5	25
Beer and wine	5	55	6	30
Dairy products	4	44	8	40
Fruit and vegetables	1	11	7	35

The role of stress as a precipitating factor has produced conflicting results^(4,5). Beer and wine have been positively associated with symptoms in a recent study as a result of the sulphide content⁽²⁾. The association of dairy products as a trigger factor is not supported by other studies^(1,2); however, patients perceived them to be a factor in the incidence of relapses. Females predominately reported fruit and vegetables as trigger factors. This finding may reflect the increased trend in fruit and vegetable consumption by women identified by the UK National Diet and Nutrition Survey 2002⁽⁶⁾.

Further investigation is needed to assess long-term dietary and lifestyle factors adopted by patients and their implications for long-term health.

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