

Meet Georgia

Little Georgia was diagnosed with Crohn's disease, an incurable condition that primarily affects the gut, at just two years old.

Donations like yours are helping to create a more hopeful future for children like Georgia who suffer from this debilitating and distressing disease. Thanks to generous donations, we're supporting a study in Southampton that aims to help children with Crohn's disease.



Georgia needed two procedures under general anaesthetic

The impact of Crohn's disease on young lives

Lead researcher: Dr J Ashton

Southampton General Hospital, University of Southampton and Southampton Children's Hospital

At least 115,000 people have Crohn's disease in the UK. Up to one third are young – less than 21 years old – when their condition is diagnosed.

Dr Ashton, who is based at the University of Southampton and also runs a clinic at Southampton Children's Hospital, explains: "Children with Crohn's disease can experience symptoms such as diarrhoea, tummy pain and tiredness, which result from inflammation in the gut."

Sadly, children with Crohn's disease tend to have more severe symptoms than adults. "The condition can have a significant impact on children's lives. Their growth, schooling and psychological wellbeing can all be affected. Symptoms can affect children's self-esteem, relationships and social lives," says Dr Ashton.

Medication and nutritional therapy can help, but many children with Crohn's disease have to undergo surgery within 10 years of diagnosis to remove damaged parts of the bowel.



"A lack of understanding of what causes Crohn's disease is hindering efforts to develop better treatments and use the treatments we have effectively," says Dr Ashton. "More research is needed urgently."

How could this research help?

“We are investigating what triggers Crohn’s disease, and its flare-ups, in children,” says Dr Ashton. “No-one knows exactly what causes the condition, but it’s thought that a combination of genetic and environmental factors are involved.”

Dr Ashton is studying the role that the community of bacteria that live in the gut – known as the microbiome – plays in triggering disease. He is also assessing how the microbiome might interact with two other factors to cause disease. One is children’s genetic susceptibility to developing Crohn’s disease, which depends on which genes they have. The other is the activity of children’s immune systems, which can change if genes are turned on or turned off.

“We hope that our findings will help in the development of better ways to predict disease severity, as well as new and improved treatments, with the ultimate goal of improving children’s lives,” says Dr Ashton.

More about Georgia

Georgia was a healthy baby but at around 12 months old, her stools became looser and she developed a severe rash on her arms and legs. After Georgia became very unwell with a high temperature and was admitted to hospital, tests to establish the cause of the rash were arranged.

Procedures under general anaesthetic confirmed doctors’ suspicions and Georgia was diagnosed with Crohn’s disease. Sadly, Georgia will have the disease for life and is likely to have recurrent flare-ups.

Little Georgia is helping to create a more hopeful future for people with Crohn’s disease by taking part in Dr Ashton’s study at Southampton Children’s Hospital – work that her mum Laura describes as ‘amazing’: “I am so impressed that it’s happening. It will hopefully benefit Georgia and many other children later on,” she says.



Georgia, who will be three this autumn, has a caring nature

action medical research
for children

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little lives**

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