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# Psychological adjustment to illness and identity-related challenges in adolescents and young adults with Crohn's disease

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#### **BACKGROUND**

Crohn's disease is often declared in adolescence, a period marked by significant changes. The literature reports physical, emotional and social repercussions, with a few studies also reporting identity-related difficulties. Although these aspects are important concerns in adolescence, few studies focused on this sensitive developmental period



### **OBJECTIVES**

The aim of this study was to retrace the experience of young adult since diagnosis in adolescence



Bi-centric recruitment at Montpellier and Rouen university hospitals



Semi-structured individual interviews via videoconference

**METHOD** 



**Double coding** on 30% of interviews. A reflective approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022)

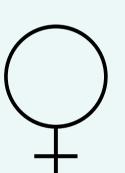
# **RESULTS**

Thematic analysis

### Participants' characteristics



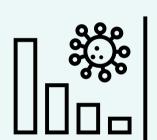
19 interviews



60% female



29 years mean age



18 years at symptoms' onset



87%

## Thematic analysis

From negative representations to more hopeful beliefs

> **Evolution of CD experience from** adolescence to early adulthood

From avoidant strategies to more efficient coping and search of meaning

From illness rejection to the integration of illness to self-perception

From a difficult illness experience

to a more serene course



"IN REALITY, EVEN THOUGH IT **FOLLOWS US EVERY DAY, IT DOES NOT DEFINE WHO WE ARE"** 



« We're already at an age when it's hard to accept ourselves, but accepting ourselves with a physique that changes regularly is complicated. » (Kyle, 25 ans)

8000 Refusal to be defined by the illness

A transformed physical appearance

A feeling of being different

« I don't want to be defined and treated according to my illness, I didn't want to be defined by it » (Marion, 20 ans)

« Before, I was a very lively person, but now I was transformed, I was a dragon, you couldn't talk to me » (Sandrine, 37 ans)

**Better understanding** of their bodies

**Better management** of their emotions

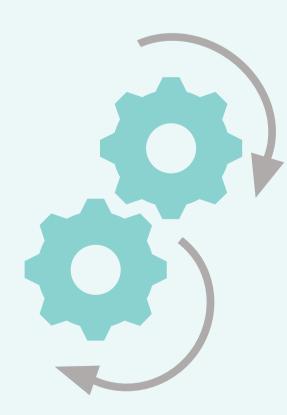
**Growth and** acceptance

it's not our whole life at all » (Cynthia, 23 ans)

« Illness isn't our whole life, it's a painful part, but

« I learned how my body reacted with the disease (...). I lived it, I experienced it personally » (Fabienne, 26 ans)

« It taught me about being kind to myself, about listening to my body. And it taught me to get out of denial, to face up to things that seemed difficult to me » (Louise, 31 ans)





#### **DISCUSSION**

For the majority of participants, although a diagnosis in adolescence initially posed identity-related challenges, it ultimately led to personal growth. This study thus highlights the importance of early psychological intervention, to support adolescents' resources and capacities of resilience, starting from the moment of diagnosis

# **Published results**

Touma, N., Zanni, L., Blanc, P., Savoye, G., & Baeza-Velasco, C. (2023). «Digesting Crohn's Disease»: The Journey of Young Adults since Diagnosis. Journal of Clinical Medicine, 12(22), 7128. <a href="https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm12227128">https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm12227128</a>

