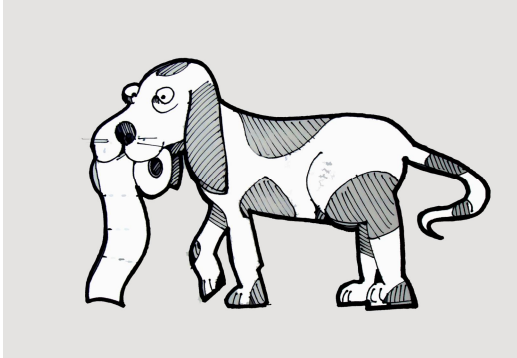


Finding Support in Your Friendships



IBD's Best Friend

IBD can be difficult not only for the patient but for the people around them. It can be difficult to watch someone you care about go through pain and suffering; not understanding the disease entirely and not knowing how to help.

You can create your own support networks by choosing whom you spend time with, educating them about your illness and preparing them to help you when you need it. Laying a good foundation for your friendships can be an important strategy in coping with your IBD. **Let your friends know** that their friendship means a lot to you, especially in times of flare-ups. It can be stressful for friends to deal with seeing someone they care about suffering; they may feel powerless. **Be prepared**—all adolescents encounter pressures from friends and others, including drugs and alcohol. Be aware that these activities can harm your body and your IBD. Know where you stand on these issues. **And be aware that sometimes, it just doesn't work out.** You may encounter some who do not handle it well. Give them a chance to understand what you are going through but do not push a situation you feel is going nowhere. You need positive influences in your life.

Finding the Right Moment

Finding the right moment can be a difficult task, especially at first. However, the more often you tell people the easier it gets. For some, it can be embarrassing or difficult and not everyone you tell will completely understand—and some possibly won't understand at all. We believe you shouldn't **hide your IBD** from good friends—having a disease is nothing to be embarrassed about. **Be positive and creative** in how you tell others about your IBD. Many individuals with IBD find when they tell someone they often get the response "Oh, I know _____ with IBD." You are not alone!

WHO DO I TELL?

You get to CHOOSE! You don't have to tell everyone.

Janelle's Story: When I want to tell new people about my Crohn's, I usually lead in by talking about my volunteer work. I tell that person how I spend a lot of time volunteering with the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada and how much it means to me. The response is usually along the lines of wondering why I chose that particular charity and I go in to my story that I have Crohn's disease and want to give back to others with the same disease.

This is usually a very comfortable conversation that flows easily and it seems better than sitting down and saying "Now I need to talk to you about something serious...I have a disease".

I find that people are usually comfortable asking questions and more often than not, they think my dedication to the cause is noble; they appreciate that I can put a positive spin on a difficult disease and then they want to help the CCFC too!

I also think that volunteering with the CCFC is a great way to get my friends together, have fun and support something that we all now feel strongly about!

CCFC also helps you meet others with IBD and it is really helpful to be able to sit down with them and chat about what is going on.

- Decide whom you are comfortable sharing information about your IBD with. Some people may only want to share their illness with their close friends, while other people are comfortable speaking in front of their entire class.
 - It feels empowering to stop others' imaginations and get that bathroom conversation out of the way.
 - You may want to tell more than one close friend at the same time to avoid having to have the same conversation over multiple occasions.
 - Take your cues from your friends.
- *TIP: It might be helpful to tell your teachers, professors and boss so that they can be part of your support system.*

WHAT DO I SAY?

You get to choose! You tell them what you think they need to know.

- Tell them what you are comfortable sharing. You don't have to tell them every little aspect.
- **Set the mood** - other people's reactions to your IBD will mostly reflect your own attitude toward it. If you are comfortable with it and can laugh about it, others likely will to.
- Try a few pick up lines+ You know how I am always going to the bathroom or You know I haven't always been able to go out when I want to with you etc.
- Use props if you aren't comfortable explaining all the details; direct them to the internet or give them some reading material (tipsheets, brochures, etc).
- You may want to explain how your condition comes and goes, that it is often a silent disease and can be hard to understand.
- As you know it can be a pretty invasive disease and sometimes with IBD you may have accidents, fistulas, and diarrhea. Share information as you think it is needed. Eg, If you have new roommates or plan to travel together, you might want to make sure they know especially if you will be in tight spaces for periods of time and in competition for a bathroom.
- Make sure you emphasise you are still the same person, but just with different circumstances sometimes. Having IBD doesn't restrict your abilities and you can still have lots of fun!!

WHERE SHOULD WE TALK?

You get to choose! Pick a location where you are comfortable and feel safe.

- Choose a discrete location where you can talk openly.
- Allocate enough time to have a good conversation with your friend.

WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME?

You get to choose! Decide if you are ready to share private problems with this friend.

- You will know when the time is right or set up a time where you are ready and prepared, physically and psychologically. Don't get overwhelmed.

WHY SHOULD I TELL ANYONE?

So Why Am I telling people? What are my motives?

- Support.
- Stop the Talk Have they noticed you being ill? Are you around them a lot? Do you tell each other everything? Are they asking questions or are concerned?

**TIP: Once you tell someone you cannot take it back. Just make sure you are telling them for the right reasons and not the wrong ones.*

Produced by the CCFC Youth Advisory Council

