

Managing Your Family

Your family can be your greatest support. It can also be your greatest challenge. The funny thing about having inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) or any chronic illness is that you not only have to manage your disease, but surprisingly, you also end up needing to manage your loved ones. IBD affects not only the individual but the entire family. It is hard for your parents, siblings, and friends to watch you suffer and at times it may seem that they are the ones with physical pain. This can be stressful and overwhelming when you are trying to understand your *own* body and emotions.



Here are a few tips to help you with *Family Management*:

- *Communicate.* Let them know what's going on or if you just need some alone time. Encourage open communication in all directions.
- *Spend some leisure time with them.* Your family journeys with you through the trials and tribulations of IBD. So share the good times too.

Janelle's story:

My family has been an amazing rock for me during my many years with IBD... but this DOES NOT mean it has always been easy! I know my IBD has been very hard - not just for me, but for my family too... and that makes me feel worse (confusing, hey?!). I found it very easy to take my Prednisone mood swings and stress about IBD out on my family - they were the closest and around the most! As we battled my IBD together, there were many inadvertent misunderstandings and tense times.

These misunderstandings can easily throw you off track. The best way to resolve these issues, we found, was for everyone involved to sit down and talk. Everyone got a chance to speak their mind and it was great to get things out in the open. Don't expect to resolve all issues in an hour, however. Sometimes a train has to derail a bit, in order to get back on track!

If you're having a fine day health wise, do something with them so they have a chance to relax and worry less.

- *Laugh with them.* Joke around; watch a funny movie. Laughter *is* the best medicine and can help relieve a lot of stress.
- *Be patient and try to see their point of view.* They may not completely understand what you're going through, and their attempts to help may not be what you want, but your family just wants to help you feel better. If you feel you are coping just fine, let them know.
- *Put yourself in their shoes.* Imagine what it's like to be a parent when everything you cook sends your kid running to the washroom. Or how it feels to be a big brother and not be able to protect your little sibling from IBD. This may help explain your family members' behaviour and anxiety – which may seem irrational to you.
- *Recognize how IBD affects your sibling's place in the family.* Siblings may receive less attention during your 'sick times' and there may be some hidden jealousy. Make sure they know you appreciate the fact it can be hard for everyone.
- *Get out of the house!* Sometimes spending too much time around the house can be stressful. Balance your life with some time by yourself, doing an activity or sport, hanging out with friends, etc.
- *Consider getting a family pet.* An animal can be great therapy for everyone in the family!

Aside from your family, you may want to seek extra support. This is OK, and doesn't mean your family and friends are not important! Sometimes it is helpful to talk to a school guidance counselor, therapist, psychologist, life coach, clergy, or someone else who is not emotionally involved in the issue (they are more neutral, have an outside perspective, etc.) You may also be able to link up with other people your age through organizations such as the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada (CCFC) and The Gutsy Generation. There are many ways to find support - make sure you find the right fit for you. As issues change and you change, the support you need may change too.

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