

Supporting someone with IBD

This information sheet is for people who want to know how to support someone in their life living with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

Key points

- Listen wholeheartedly and give the person with IBD your full attention to what they say.
- There are practical things you can do to help someone living with IBD, for example prepare a meal or walk the dog.
- Many people living with IBD can manage many aspects of their healthcare on their own, but some need support. Have a conversation to see if and how you can help them.

How to start a conversation

When someone is unwell, it can be hard to know what to say or what you can do to support them. Here are some dos and don'ts to help guide your conversation.

Do

- **Choose your timing wisely.** Set aside plenty of time to have a conversation and find a quiet place free from distractions.
- **Listen wholeheartedly** and resist the urge to interrupt. Give the person your full attention and listen to what they say.
- **Ask clarifying questions.** Questions might include “can you tell me more about...?” or “what does it mean when you say...?”

Don't

- **Don't express platitudes.** Phrases like “everything happens for a reason” can be off-putting and insensitive despite your best intentions. Simply acknowledging the person's experiences and showing you're willing to listen can help someone with IBD feel supported and less alone.
- **Don't overdo positive encouragement.** Putting emphasis on being positive or overtly encouraging someone to think positively can seem like you are minimising the person's experiences and concerns, or that you have not really listened to what they have shared.
- **Don't give advice unless you're asked directly.** It can undermine the person's ability to solve their own problems and may come across as disrespectful, which can lead to frustration on both sides. Advice about causes or cures should be left to the health professionals.

4 practical questions to ask someone with IBD

1. Is it ok for me to ask about your IBD?
2. What would be helpful for me to know about your IBD?
3. What are some practical things I can do to help?
4. What do you need from me today?

Tips for family and friends

Here are 5 practical things you can do to help a family member or friend with IBD:

1. **Prepare a meal.** Check whether they are on a restricted diet first.
2. **Do a load of laundry.** It's simple yet effective but be sure to ask first before you gather up all their clothes.
3. **Walk the dog.** Walking the dog can be challenging for someone with IBD when they're unwell. Offering to take their dog for a walk can be a big help.
4. **Pick up their medication from the pharmacy.** It might be hard for them to leave the house at times. Offering to pick up their medication or other essential items can be a big help.
5. **Take them out or plan a movie night.** A change of scenery can do a lot of good, but they may not always be well enough to go out. When they're feeling up to it you could suggest a movie night at their place or ask their help in planning a trip out.

What aspects of a person's healthcare can I help with?

Many people living with IBD are self-sufficient and can manage many aspects of their healthcare on their own. However, some people, especially if they are newly diagnosed, might like additional support. Consider having a conversation to see if and how you can help. Some ideas include helping them book appointments, taking them to appointments and being a second pair of ears, and helping them review information about medications or tests to create a list of questions for their IBD team.

The more you know about IBD, the more you'll be able to support someone living with the condition. For more information, including tips for supporting a co-worker, visit the Crohn's & Colitis Australia website through the QR code.

For help or information

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Phone: 1800 138 029