

Psychosocial Issues

What You Should Expect From Us

- To talk to you and listen to your opinions and concerns.
- To check in with you about stress, feelings/emotions, school issues, social concerns, and difficulties with any aspect of your care (like taking your medicines).
- Access to a psychologist who can talk to you in clinic or a referral to a therapist if needed to help you overcome any difficulties you may be having.

What We Expect From You

- Open and honest communication about how you are feeling
- To let us know if you are having difficulties dealing with your IBD
- Tell us when there is stress or other difficulties in your life
- Keep appointments with therapists
- Ask questions – there are no wrong questions, and it's good to have lots of questions

Why This is Important

We are not only interested in your IBD – we are interested in you as a person too. Having IBD can be hard at times, and we want to help you with all aspects of your life that can be affected by IBD. It is stressful dealing with a chronic illness, visiting the doctor's office often, and following your treatment plan, all while just trying to live a "normal" life. Patients with IBD may be embarrassed by their symptoms or the frequent need to use the bathroom. They may feel uncomfortable talking to their friends or family about their disease and can often feel like an outsider. A lot of research has shown that psychological issues like stress and sadness can affect medical conditions. Addressing the psychological or emotional concerns might actually help the symptoms of IBD!

What Therapists Do

Therapists can help patients adjust to life with IBD.

They can help answer questions like:

- Who should I tell about my IBD? How should I tell them? What do I say if they ask questions?
- What do I do if I have to go to the bathroom A LOT at school?
- What do I do if I'm having pain at school?
- What if I've missed a lot of school, and I'm having a hard time going back?
- Any other questions about life with IBD.

Therapists can also help with stress management, pain management, taking medicine (such as learning how to swallow pills and remembering to take medicine), depression, anxiety, and other emotional issues.. They can work with the school to help you transition back if you have missed a lot of time at school. They can help you cope

with pain when you're not home and help you maintain a social life when you are having a flare.

A therapist usually meets with you for 45–50 minutes. Parents can be involved, too. Depending on your schedule and needs, you might meet with a therapist every week or every other week. You might be able to coordinate your therapy sessions with your Remicade infusions and/or GI appointments. We also know therapists closer to where you live and can connect you with them if needed.

Coping with Stress

Here are some things to keep in mind to help you cope with stress:

- Be realistic about your workload. It is important not to take on too many responsibilities with school, work and extracurricular activities.
- Exercise and follow a good diet.
- Get enough sleep. (Recommend at least 8 hours per night).
- Write in a journal.
- Talk to someone, such as a therapist, parent, sibling, teacher, or friend for support.
- Use relaxation techniques such as those listed below.
 1. **Deep breathing:** Close your eyes and take slow deep breaths through your nose. Exhale slow and long breaths through your mouth. Repeat.
 2. **Guided imagery:** Close your eyes and take deep breaths in and out. Visualize yourself in a relaxing and happy place (like at the beach). Focus on what/who you see? Hear? Smell? Touch?
 3. **Meditation:** Close your eyes and take deep breaths in and out. Choose a positive, relaxing self-statement (like “Relax” or “Breathe”) and repeat this statement to yourself slowly (“relax...relax...relax”). Keep breathing in and out.

Lifestyle

You can live a normal life with IBD. Patients with IBD go to college, play sports, have jobs, and are able to participate in almost all activities. Most patients with IBD can have children and families of their own, if they desire.

You will also likely be faced with decisions about other things such as smoking and alcohol use. Both smoking and alcohol use can negatively affect disease activity and how well medications work. Our best advice is to never start smoking. Talk to your doctor about resources to stop smoking if you've already started, and about how alcohol might affect your disease and medications. All of these issues should be discussed openly and honestly with your doctor.

Managing school work can also be difficult when dealing with a chronic illness such as IBD. Doctor's appointments and flares may lead to missed school days. Teachers and school administrators may not fully understand your disease. There are several resources that may be helpful to address these concerns. For example, an individualized educational plan (IEP) or a 504 plan can be developed with the help of your school to address any concerns. These issues should be discussed with your

doctor or social worker. See more information about 504 plan in the School/College section.

Talking about IBD

Another issue you may face is that it can be difficult to talk about your disease to your friends, other family members, or school or work peers and they might not even understand. However, patients find it helpful to have at least 1 or 2 people with whom they feel comfortable talking about the disease. Tell them whatever you are comfortable telling them. Some people tell their friends that they have a “stomach problem” that makes them need to go to the bathroom more often. They tell them they need to take medication for it. Others tell their friends more details about what IBD is and how it affects them. Your friends should know that they cannot “catch” IBD from you and that it is safe to play or hang out with you. There are also opportunities to share your stories with other children and teens with IBD. The Crohn’s & Colitis Foundation (CCFA) has local chapters across the country that offers both educational programs and support groups. CCFA also sponsors Camp Oasis, a summer camp for children and teens with IBD.