

Communicating your IBD

Communicating with friends

You may need to discuss:

- **your illness and its effects on you;**
- **your trust in them;**
- **your activities with them**

Who/what is a friend? Friends are people who you know well and regard with affection and trust. In this way, a close friend will feel like someone who is part of the family, especially if you have known them for a long time.

Emotional support

A lot of the communication issues that apply to family may apply to your friends – at least your closest friend(s). They will care about you; they will worry about you – so you need to think carefully about how to communicate with them. Sometimes, you will be able to tell a close friend things about your IBD which you would find difficult to tell your family. This is all part of building a support network for yourself – and is actually true about many wider aspects of life, not just communicating about IBD.

Trust

Not all friends are the same, so your communication with them may have to be different. You may be happy that some of your friends know about your IBD, while there will be other friends you may not wish to confide in. Be comfortable about what you want to disclose, and what you want to keep private.

Be conscious that friendships can come and go; trust and disclosure is important, as once you have confided in someone, there is no going back. However, when you have acquired long-term friendships – with individuals you are very comfortable with – close friendships can be a hugely beneficial. This is especially important when you need someone to confide in, but without the emotional complications that communicating with a partner or family can bring.

Be careful, as such confidences may be misinterpreted if they are not judged carefully. For example, if you were to tell your close friend something about your IBD (meaning also to tell your partner), but in the meantime your partner found out about this from another route, might they be upset? Similarly, if you tell your partner something without telling your mother, might she be hurt?

This is not to say that you should not have such conversations; just be aware of the possibility that an innocent conversation may cause unnecessary upset. So, when talking with friends, it is important that you consider how such communications might affect your relationship with other groups, especially your partner and family.

Going out

Your friends will realise that some days there are certain things you can do with them – other days they will know you can't.

Some days you may feel it is a big issue when you can't do what you want to do with your friends (going out, dating, travelling, visiting, socialising, going to the cinema, having a drink). Remember, it only becomes an issue if you (and your friends) let it. Yes, IBD can make your life frustrating at times, but true friendship is for the long term.