

## Achieving more with IBD

### Employment

#### Top Tips

- You do not have to disclose your condition to your employer, but it is usually better to do so
- A challenging job will not necessarily worsen your IBD
- Maintaining activities appropriate for the severity of your symptoms can lead to a better quality of life
- Working can improve your well-being and self-esteem

Most people with IBD have a good, satisfying working life, with all the usual benefits that having a job brings.

You are not obliged to tell a potential employer about your IBD unless you are directly asked about having a health condition during your interview; however, if you deliberately withhold this information and your employer finds out later, you could risk being dismissed. In addition, if you have not declared your IBD your employer will not know to support you by making any necessary adjustments to accommodate you and your condition.

In some countries grant schemes exist to provide financial support to employers who recruit people who have been legally granted a degree of disability; this may improve your chances of employment in some cases. Under European Union law employers also have a legal obligation to avoid any type of unlawful discrimination.

Specific employment rights vary by country. Your national IBD association may have useful information and links on employment and discrimination.

If you are already in a job and are diagnosed with IBD, or your condition deteriorates, you may wonder about telling your employer. There is generally no legal requirement, but check whether such a requirement is in your employment contract. There are advantages to telling your employer: keeping your symptoms hidden may be a strain; if your employer is aware of your condition they may make adjustments for you. A lack of trust/understanding with your employer can lead to problems.

If you tell an employer or prospective employer about your IBD, you may not wish it to become public knowledge. However, telling your colleagues about your condition and what it entails means they are more likely to give you the support and assistance you need, and so help to create a better working environment.

For more information on communication issues in IBD, one can refer to [Living with IBD/Communicating IBD](#)

It is important that you are aware of your rights regarding sick leave and payment, pension rights and job security. If you feel you are being discriminated against because of your IBD, speak to your human resources/personnel manager or the person in charge of employee relations in the company.

It is important not to let your IBD impose a restriction on your education and employment goals and aspirations. A recent study has shown that there is no clear relationship between stress and IBD. Therefore an increase in work responsibilities does not necessarily lead to an increase in disease activity, and so your decision (for example) to accept a promotion, or move to a more challenging post, should not be influenced by this, but on whether the job is right for you.

People with IBD tend to have a better quality of life if they maintain certain activities appropriate for their symptoms, including continuing to work.

## **Job seekers guide**

In order for you to assess whether a job is right for you consider the following questions.

- How many hours can you work each day?
- How many hours can you travel to work?
- How many toilet breaks do you need on average?
- Do you need to take medication at work?
- Do you have pain at work?
- Does the pain stop you from working?
- Is your employer flexible?
- How many hours/days a week can you work?
- Can you work from home?
- What is the sick leave policy?
- Do you get time off from work for doctor's appointments?
- Is there colleague support?
- Is there good toilet access?

Because some people with IBD (but not all) need to use a toilet frequently, travelling to and from work can be very taxing, and you may find the necessity, or even the possibility, of having to use toilet facilities en route daunting.

For example, a long underground or bus journey where it is difficult to get off and back on can often create psychological problems. Indeed, 'fearing failure' to get to toilet facilities in time can turn into a desire to use the toilet when not actually necessary. Without the proper behavioural support mechanisms, the danger is that the individual with IBD may avoid difficult situations (for example, declining work and social invitations that they label as "not necessary"), which can lead to further isolation. This pattern of behaviour is sometimes difficult to break.

However, you can learn techniques to avoid such restrictive behaviour. Self-efficacy (which is a belief that you can exercise control over specific events) will allow for a successful working life. Enabling thought processes, and the ability to access our feelings, all influence how well you approach life. Talk to your healthcare practitioner about these techniques, so they can put you in touch with a qualified professional who can provide guidance on these.