

## Your IBD Consultation

### Getting the most from your consultation

**How can I work with my physician to gain maximum benefit from my consultation? I find it difficult to talk to my doctor about personal issues - how can I overcome this?**

Some people find it difficult to start conversations with their physician about their symptoms and concerns. If you have been suffering from the condition for a long time, it may be tempting to minimise your symptoms for a variety of reasons, such as fear of requiring surgery, embarrassment or perceived lack of time. Here are some tips to help you get your points across:

- Start the conversation in terms of something you know about and enjoy. For example, think about what is most important to you in your life, and how your IBD is affecting it. Then use that as a starting point in describing how you are doing and also what you want to be able to do that you can't now. One helpful question might be: 'What can't you do now that you used to enjoy doing?'
- Give your list of questions to your physician at the start of the consultation. That way, he or she is bringing up the issues and saving you from having to initiate the questions
- Bring either a family member or friend to your consultation to help you remember key points after the visit as well as any points you wanted to say or ask during the consultation
- Learn a few key words related to IBD to help you communicate better with your physician. See the [Glossary](#) section on this website for some helpful definitions.

### SOAP

You may find it helpful to approach the conversation the way your physician has been trained to gather information and develop a management plan, using the metaphor 'SOAP':

**S** = subjective (focus on the facts, such as what, when, how long and where in order to help give an idea of what the problem or concern is about)

**O** = objective (be as descriptive as possible when describing changes or a problem that is worrying you, and imagine your physician writing these details into your notes)

**A** = assessment (your physician formulates a list of potential causes and solutions, weighing the risks and benefits)

**P** = plan (based on the assessment, the physician draws up a plan for further testing and treatment).

Sometimes, even if you are satisfied with your current treatment, your IBD may still be affecting your ability to enjoy leisure activities or work. It is important, therefore, for you and your doctor to not only discuss your symptoms but also how they are affecting your quality of life. Working together, you and your physician can put your quality of life at the centre of your treatment plan and ensure that these important issues are being addressed.

This may mean that you will at times need to take the initiative to start a conversation with your physician about the impact symptoms are having on your daily life and ask about other treatment options that may be available to help. Equally important, you will need to be clear about your willingness to try a new treatment option if one becomes available.

Likewise, it is important to listen to your physician carefully and consider that what he or she is saying based on experience and training. By speaking openly and honestly with each other, you can work together as a team to solve problems and work out a plan for managing your IBD, and have the best chance of a positive outcome.

If you have had IBD for a long time, it may be tempting to minimise your symptoms for a variety of reasons, such as fear of requiring surgery, but you must be honest with your doctor. It is important, for you and your doctor to not only discuss your symptoms but also how they are affecting your quality of life, so you and your physician can put your quality of life at the centre of your treatment plan

## **What makes a good (and bad) consultation?**

### **You are likely to have a good consultation if:**

- You are well prepared in advance - bring a list of questions and the notes about your symptoms, and know what to expect during the consultation
- You and your doctor discuss quality of life as well as symptoms, including the impact your IBD is having on your daily activities and how well your treatment is working
- All tests and treatments given to you are explained clearly by your physician in words you can understand
- You feel that you are communicating well with your physician and your questions are answered
- Any necessary follow-up is explained clearly to you by your physician and/or nurse
- Together, you and your physician agree on your treatment plan and how it may be altered if needed
- You are given contact information and instructions for what to do if you need assistance or have questions before your next visit.

### **You are likely to have a bad consultation if:**

- There is too much focus on your symptoms and not enough on quality of life and impact on daily activities, relationships and how you are coping
- You leave with unanswered questions or are confused about an answer you were given
- You are unsure of what to do if your symptoms worsen or problems arise
- Either you or your physician spends most of the time talking, rather than the consultation being a partnership with shared communication
- You do not answer your physician's questions honestly, openly and completely and, as a result, your physician does not get the full picture of how you are really coping

## **What if things don't go well?**

If you aren't happy with the way your consultation went, it is possible to have a follow up appointment with your physician to clarify on anything that you may feel unsure about. Also remember that you have a healthcare team, and quite possibly the nurse will be able to help clarify points or answer any further questions you may have. Additionally, support groups are available across Europe that provide services, peer support and information for people with IBD and their families. When it comes to decisions about treatment options or surgical procedures, you may find reassurance by asking for a second opinion. Your physician will understand and support your wishes.