

Communicating your IBD

Communicating with your employer

You may need to discuss:

- **your illness and its effects on your work activities;**
- **your legal responsibilities to your employer;**
- **their legal responsibilities to you**

Don't let your employer fill in the gaps! It is in your interest to be honest and open with them: you'd tell them if you had a family bereavement, and they would be happy to help (because they know what the problem is). But if they do not know, they cannot help – and may jump to assumptions about you which at best would be wrong, and which at worst could be detrimental to your relationship with them. However, it is possible that some employers may react badly... You will need to carefully consider the way in which you disclose information and weigh up the effect that it may have. European law provides some protection, but often there is no legal requirement to disclose illness, and employers documenting a chronic illness may occasionally behave inappropriately.

Time off work

You may need regular time off work if you are having regular treatments – therefore your employer needs to know, so they can help you. Remember, **management of your condition must take priority**. If you, or your employer, let it become secondary to going to work, you will soon become too ill to be able to go to work.

Trust is the basis of so many relationships, even with your employer. If your employer knows about your IBD, you are entrusting them with a confidence. In return, armed with this knowledge, they should feel empowered to treat you with courtesy, respect, sympathy, and to offer you support. If you are unwell, your employer will understand why you may not be able to come to the office. There will not be any mystery as to why you need to take sick leave, so there is security on both sides.

Working effectively

If you are an effective employee, employers will benefit if they look after you. Just because you have IBD, it does not mean that you cannot do your job, contribute to the company, or work effectively. Many, many people with IBD manage to work, study, achieve targets and contribute with the support of their employers. Being honest and open with them can make going to work a lot easier. Open communication about your needs will allow flexibility, which should reduce worry about the impact of your symptoms upon work.

Discussing your IBD

So what do you say to your employer? Again, it is very much a personal thing, depending on your confidence in that person, your level of trust in them, and your perception of how they can deal with this information.

It may be that you do not need/want to go into details (e.g. about toilet issues, or symptoms, or the emotional aspects of your disease) but would rather keep the conversation at the level of (for example) needing regular toilet breaks (on some occasions) so you will be away from your desk. It may be that you need to explain that some days you will feel more ill than others, so may not be able to take on particular tasks in the office.

Some employers may need guidance as to what they should expect – as they may decide to find out more about IBD from independent sources and the information they might find (for example on the internet) may be of variable quality, or may not apply to you.

On the other hand, some employers may feel happy for you to take the lead, and for you to let them know about your particular needs, on any given occasion – i.e. trusting you to manage what support you require from your work in an honest, trustworthy manner.

Communicating with your employer can be challenging, and will very much depend upon your personal circumstances, but it is important to do.

Legal responsibilities

If you are a new employee, as part of your employment contract you MAY need to disclose that you have IBD, whether you perceive it will affect your ability to do your job or not. If you are unsure, you should ask advice from your Union, from Citizen's Advice (or an equivalent independent counselling service), your healthcare practitioner, or others with IBD.

Where your employer has difficulties in coming to terms with the requirements of your illness, and supporting you in these, you may need to seek help and advice from a wider circle within your support network (partner, family, physician), or try some other way of communicating with them – perhaps involving that individual's senior management, or your Union or Human Resources? Remember, there are a whole range of different conditions which legally require such support; IBD is not unique in this respect.

Specific employment rights vary by country. Your national IBD association may have useful information and links on employment and discrimination. See the [EFCCA Member Associations list](#) (also at the top of this page) for a list of national associations.