



Prescription
for Success:

10 Ways

to Develop
a Partnership

with Your Healthcare Team



Learning as much as you can about your condition will help you feel more in control of your disease — and your life. You will also be able to compile questions for your doctor based on your knowledge, as well as wisely use the limited time allotted for doctor visits. Your doctor will appreciate your taking an interest in your health. When searching online, be sure to note the source of the information to be sure it is reliable and timely. Our Web site, www.cdfa.org, offers a wealth of valuable and comprehensive information. Your local library is another great resource. During your doctor's visit, you may want to verify any information you found either online or at your local library to confirm that it is accurate and current.

Write Moves: People with IBD experience different symptoms and these symptoms often change over time. Keeping a journal about your disease can offer you and your doctor important insight about any changes in your condition — for better or worse. You can pick up a lavish journal at your local bookstore or opt for a simple spiral notebook. Noting your meals, physical activities, sleep patterns, stress level, and a general overview of how you felt on a given day can be very helpful to both you and your doctor. It's also a good idea to record any side effects you are experiencing from your medication. Even though you may think you are aware of what or how much you eat or the amount of exercise you get every day, you may be surprised to find out otherwise after reviewing your journal entries. You may forget something that you think is a trivial detail, but can potentially help your doctor devise or revise your treatment plan. Once

Living with IBD is like riding a roller coaster. You may have times when you're feeling up and other times when you feel so low you don't even want to leave the house. But by taking an active role in your medical care, you can help minimize the fluctuations that

characterize IBD and help maximize the quality of your life. Below are ten ways to help you develop a positive partnership with your healthcare team and take action towards a healthier life:

Read All About It: Empower yourself by researching your condition and keeping up-to-date with the latest medical reports.

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you start keeping a journal, you will have a better understanding of how your body works and an essential tool for your entire healthcare team.

Can You Relate? It's important to have positive interactions with your doctor, as well as every member of your healthcare team. Does your doctor make you feel comfortable? Can you tell your doctor if you are having trouble following your prescribed treatment plan? Is it easy to work with his or her staff? Do you understand his or her explanations regarding your condition? Are you confident your doctor will come through for you in an emergency situation? If you're currently trying to find a new doctor, you may want to make a list of the qualities you are looking for in this person. You may also want to ask other people with IBD for referrals. If you have been

seeing the same doctor for a considerable length of time, take a moment to reflect upon your experiences. Having a positive partnership with your doctor is especially important when you have a chronic condition. You want to be sure you are getting the time and attention you deserve. You also want to know you can count on your doctor to devise the best possible treatment plan for your specific needs.

Cross Talk: All of your doctors should be kept abreast of your health status. Be sure that you have a primary doctor who is overseeing all of your medical treatments. Before taking any medical tests, make a list of the doctors who should be sent a copy of the results. Confirm that you have the correct address and phone number for each

of these doctors. You may also want to keep their fax numbers handy, too. In addition, put your name on the list so you can also receive a copy of all medical reports for your records. Inquire about when your test results should be available and when they will be mailed out.

Attention to Detail: Prior to your appointment, compile a list of questions for your doctor. By doing so, you will be able to be more focused during your appointment and you won't run the risk of forgetting to ask an important question. It's helpful to organize your questions by subject matter so you can focus on one topic at a time. For example, you may want to group all of your drug-related questions together.



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Keeping like topics together is also a helpful practice when taking notes since each subject will have its own section.

Take the Test: Bring a copy of any lab work, eye exams, or any other tests you have had since your last appointment. It's critical to keep your doctor current on every aspect so he or she can see the overall state of your health to ensure you get the appropriate treatment.

Tell All: When providing your doctor with an update about your condition, it's important to be completely candid, even if your answers may not be what you think your doctor wants to hear. For example, if you are thinking about discontinuing your maintenance medication (or have already done so without your doctor's consent) be sure to share this information with your doctor (See "Take Your Medicine: It REALLY Is Good for You" on page 30). If you're having trouble following your treatment plan, now is the time to speak up. Let your doctor know if you are encountering unmanageable side effects from your medication. It's extremely important

to tell your doctor if you have been experiencing any other symptoms, even if you don't believe such symptoms are IBD-related. These symptoms include eye-related problems, joint pain, skin problems, increased fatigue, lower energy, or discomfort in any part of your body. Your doctor is the best person to judge whether or not a particular symptom is related to your IBD. In addition, tell your doctor if you have started or resumed smoking or if you have introduced new foods into your diet. And, inform your doctor if you have been taking any new supplements or vitamins, including natural complementary therapies, or if you have embarked on a new exercise regimen. If you've been keeping a journal, you may want to take it along on your next appointment so you won't forget to share any information.

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On a Positive Note: Be sure to bring a notebook and pen into both the examining room and the doctor's office so you can jot down important information. If you brought along a family member or friend, you may delegate the task of "scribe" to this individual. It is difficult to ask questions and take notes at the same time, because you are trying to absorb the information being presented to you.

Focus on Follow-up: Find out the best way to contact your doctor. Is email an option? In the case of routine matters, is there a nurse or physician assistant you can contact? If so, introduce yourself to such individuals during your next doctor's appointment. When you do call your doctor, be sure to be clear about whether you are in an emergency situation, or if you're calling for a routine matter, such as prescription-drug refills or to schedule an appointment. If your call is time-sensitive, but not a true emergency, be sure to share this with the receptionist, as well. Under all circumstances, keep your message as clear and concise as possible.

For the Record: "Be prepared" is a good mantra for those living with IBD. In the event that you need to apply for disability benefits, switch insurance plans, or move to a new area, it is essential to maintain a file with all of your records because compiling such a file at a moment's notice is an overwhelming task — and one your doctor won't appreciate. Help your doctor help you by keeping your records up to date. A great resource on disability benefits, insurance, employment discrimination and other IBD-related legal issues, is *Know Your Rights:*

A Handbook for Patients with Inflammatory Bowel Disease, available in CCFA's online bookstore at www.ccfa.org/store or by calling **800.932.2423**.

Following these ten tips can lead the way to a mutually beneficial partnership with your healthcare team, and a much healthier and happier you. ■

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