



Sari Legge, a former radio announcer from the Midwest, currently resides in Rhode Island with her husband, Pete, and son, Jacob. Sari is a board member of the IBD Quilt Project and a CCFA member.

A New Life with IBD

Q: Hi Sari, I just started school (college) about two weeks ago. I love my classes and my roommate and I'm having the best time. I've met a lot of people already and may join a sorority in the spring. It's all so great! I've had Crohn's for more than five years and had my routine down pretty well at home, but everything changing so suddenly is almost more than I can handle. Huge new buildings are hiding their bathrooms from me, new foods are available at odd times...it's an IBD obstacle course! Can you give me some pointers on surviving and making the most out of this new experience?

AF at K State

A: Sari Says...

Hi AF! Welcome to your new experiences and best of luck rushing sororities. Did you and your folks plan ahead in anticipation of being away from home for the first time? A very easy thing you can do is to get a map of the campus. Ask a sophomore friend to notate on the map where all the restrooms are in your key buildings. You can go to your RA or an advisor to ASK for

help in getting familiar with the layout. While no one has to know why you want the toilet tour, there is no shame in having a chronic illness — even our illness. Goodness knows there are plenty of folks who “*gotta go right now!*” You are taking on some adult aspects of life right now. Handle your new world by being proactive before you get into trouble!

The next things are fairly basic: Do you have your health insurance ready for your university? Is there a contingent GP and GI in your plan? Get your “Go-to” resource ready to meet trouble with your Crohn's on the spot! Where is the town ER and hospital? Have you gotten all your meds squared away?

Have you made a set budget for yourself to fight temptation? After all, money drives a lot of choices for going off your meal plan! Life is under *your* control for perhaps the first time. Many people have to work through university, and if you are also working, exhausting yourself is a sure way to kick off a flare! Be honest with yourself about what's healthy for you.

AF, I want you to joyously soak up these new surroundings, but rather than focus on IBD, let's take a look at the big picture. Just bear with me here, okay — this is not a lecture. Well...maybe it *is* a little lecture...

If you cannot speak to your parents about your life issues and choices, then make sure you have someone with whom you can say anything you need to without a filter. You need a safe place to trade opinions. You are likely under 21. Don't rush things by throwing booze or drugs into your body right now. Not only will you burn a lot of money, but your body is auto-immune problematic. What other people can cope with, you may not be able to get away with so cleanly. Plus, missing credits from “Beer Flu” doesn't garner a lot of sympathy in secondary education! I think good judgment in your choices will not only help solve your IBD questions to me, but will enhance the whole experience you've begun.

As I said earlier, money can help guide your choices right now. Running up a bill on your cell or credit card is as much of a test as eating a blooming onion with chili cheese fries! Without moderation and control in mind, you'll quickly go down in flames. You will want to test it, taste it, try it and push it right now. Being in charge of yourself is a blast. It really is a wonderful time of life. Try to focus on long-term impact instead of short-term satisfaction when making certain choices. Doing so will serve you well through life. This is a “big picture” education opportunity. Youth is about making mistakes that you can bounce



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back from. Do me a favor and take those mistakes as lessons to become smarter by. Don’t spiral down in dramas of guilt. If you screw up, learn from it. No more than that. Take responsibility for your actions during triumph and failures. You did it, you own it! The difference between ignorance and stupidity is pretty simple to keep in mind. If you make a mistake because you didn’t know better, that is being ignorant. You can learn from it. If you make that mistake knowing it is wrong in the first place — hey! That’s stooooopidity in action.

Lessons I learned early in my first independent months took hold only after a myriad of missteps. I would get checking overdraft charges.

I thought dad would bail me out if I whined. He didn’t, and he was right. If I didn’t wash the dishes in my apartment, no one did! My laundry funkified in its unwashed tangle on the floor and my carpet got nasty with God knows what-all. My Crohn’s response was to get sick with all that filth! Who knew?! I lost my first damage deposit with that Middle Earth mural done in acrylic paint too! No one was there to goad me to do *what I had always been taught* at home. More dangerous was my experimentation in men. Seeking self-validation through the eyes of others was perhaps the most painful of lessons to learn in my 20’s. You’re lucky I’m on a word count here! *Moderation* is your watch word while no one but you takes charge.

FINAL SPIN: Whether it is a move, a new school, a job change, relationship shifts, death and taxes — your IBD health is going to be affected by circumstances beyond your control throughout your life. We are no different from anyone else in that regard. If you are able to gift yourself with faith (however you understand it), loving standards of behavior, and common sense — you will become a summa cum laude in good living!

We all have an inner compass, a voice of reason or warning. That’s our built-in early warning system. Listen to your instincts. Trust your compass through smooth or rough terrain and you’ll come out where you need to be every time.

Finally, as a dear announcer friend of mine used to sign off his show by saying to his listeners, “Drive no faster than your guardian angel can fly.” ■

Please write to Sari with your questions c/o takecharge@ccfa.org.