



Managing stress in IBD



Psychological stress and IBD

Psychological stress is the result of experiences that threaten to overwhelm your capacity to respond effectively. In IBD (like in virtually every other chronic disease), depression, anxiety and chronic stress can dramatically add to the burden of disease.

In people with **ulcerative colitis**, stress may trigger a **recurrence of active disease**.

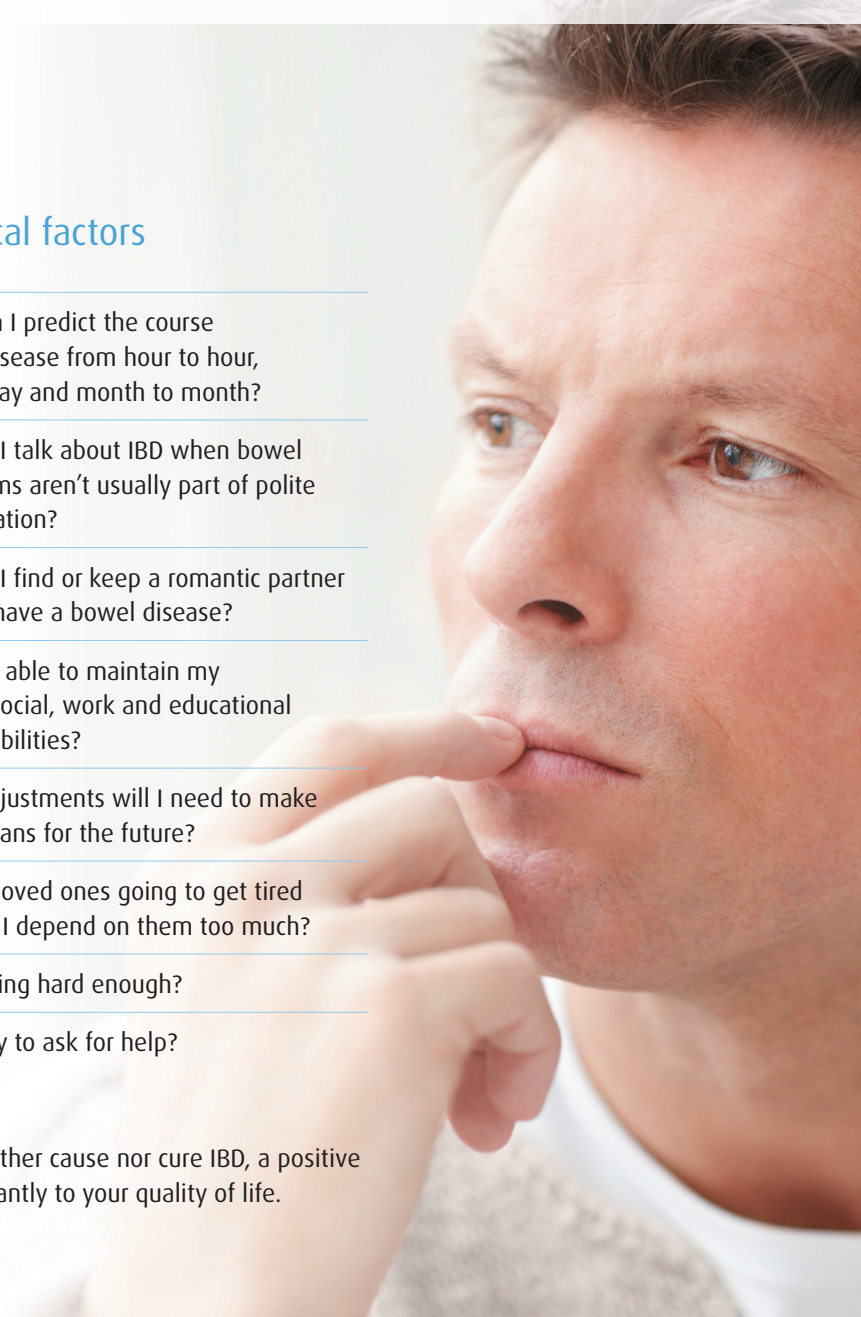
In people with **Crohn's disease**, depression may **increase inflammation**.

If you have ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease, careful attention to the role of stress and other psychological factors in your life may provide substantial benefits both for the quality of your life, and in some cases for maintaining remission of your disease or reducing inflammation.

Common psychological factors

Uncertainty	How can I predict the course of my disease from hour to hour, day to day and month to month?
Embarrassment	How do I talk about IBD when bowel symptoms aren't usually part of polite conversation?
Anxiety	How do I find or keep a romantic partner when I have a bowel disease?
Worry	Will I be able to maintain my family, social, work and educational responsibilities?
Adjustment	What adjustments will I need to make to my plans for the future?
Dependence	Are my loved ones going to get tired of me if I depend on them too much?
Guilt	Am I trying hard enough?
Doubt	Is it okay to ask for help?

While psychological factors neither cause nor cure IBD, a positive attitude can contribute significantly to your quality of life.



Maintain a stable sleep pattern, eat a healthy diet and engage in moderate exercise. These are powerful tools to maximize your health.

Try to accept and tolerate problems that can't be fixed

Learn and use relaxation techniques or meditation

Avoid caffeine

Take time for leisure

Engage with life by being an active part of your family, circle of friends or community

Keep a sense of humour



Maintaining resilience to stress

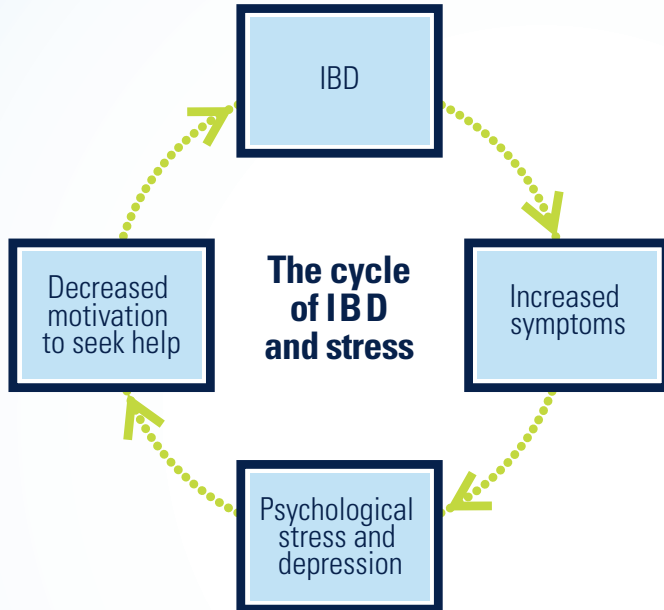
Attend to your spiritual needs

Try to identify and fix problems as they occur. The constructive effort to try to solve a problem usually reduces stress – even more than the problem itself!

Depression and IBD: A vicious cycle

Depression is a very common illness. 1 in 5 women and 1 in 10 men will experience a major depression at some point in their life.

People who live with chronic diseases like IBD are at an increased risk of experiencing depression. The **losses and frustrations** that come with living with a disease, the biological effects of **inflammation** on the brain and **medications** such as prednisone may all contribute to depression.



Taking control of stress and IBD

Everyone is different when it comes to coping with stress. In general, most people find that problem-solving, seeking emotional and practical support, looking for the positives in challenging situations, maintaining realistic expectations and keeping a sense of humour are the most productive ways of coping. Denial, avoidance and acting out of anger are less successful ways of coping.

Many people with IBD also find that practicing yoga, meditation and deep breathing help them to relax and better cope with stress.

Your best way of coping depends on your own personality. You may feel most comfortable when you have a lot of information, and spend time on the Internet doing research about your disease and your medications. Or, you may only want information on a need-to-know basis, and feel content with letting your healthcare providers recommend choices.

Having a chronic disease means that over time you will likely need to make use of a variety of medical resources. You may find that you have the best results when you form an alliance with your healthcare providers and face the problem as a team.

There are many ways to cope with the stress that can come along with IBD. What's most important is finding a coping mechanism that works for you. If you need more ideas, why not try linking up with other people with IBD? Ask your healthcare team about the next Mount Sinai Hospital IBDWell education session and see how you can benefit.

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