



Support Groups (for IBD & IBS)

Our support groups are regular gatherings for individuals who have a gastrointestinal disease or disorder. The purpose of these meetings is to provide and exchange information related to the group focus, to offer one another support, and to share experiences and proven coping strategies. Participants are encouraged to speak freely about problems, concerns, frustrations, and to contribute their helpful hints, information, encouragement, and support. We never expect anyone to volunteer any information he or she wishes to keep private.

Meetings are open to the public and there is no charge to attend. Occasionally, we invite various medical experts and other qualified professionals to give speeches, mini-seminars, or presentations, with time allowed for questions. We dedicate a significant portion of each meeting to informal, open sharing and discussion.

Friends and family are welcome to attend, as are medical professionals and anyone who would like more information on these topics.

Our support groups cover significantly divergent topics and therefore we classify them by ailment type. For example, our inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) groups are for those people with Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, ulcerative proctitis, and microscopic colitis. The components of these chronic diseases are such that information, medication, and coping strategies are similar and therefore one group can cover these concerns.

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is very different from IBD, so individuals with IBS meet separately. Some people with diverticular disease, hiatus hernia, ulcer disease, and GERD might find the IBS groups helpful as well.

The GI Society offers a number of support groups across Canada. These groups meet at various locations and new ones form from time to time. Contact our office for possible dates and times in your area or refer to schedules in the *Inside Tract*[®] newsletter, or on our website.

Why go to a support group meeting?

Dealing with a chronic medical problem is not easy, particularly if you don't have a strong support system, or if your doctor is the only one you feel comfortable talking with about

your health condition. Some people find it worthwhile to meet with others who share the same disease or disorder and who understand what they are going through.

Learning ways others are managing might ease your adjustment to life with a new diagnosis or even relieve some of the challenges posed by long-term intestinal problems. Discussions with fellow group members may foster in you a greater understanding and acceptance of your circumstances, which can reduce the anxiety associated with a chronic medical ailment.

Discussions are usually lively and, while staying on the topic of the disease at hand, issues can vary broadly, since a digestive condition can affect many aspects of a person's life. Jobs, personal relationships, spare-time pursuits such as vacations, holiday celebrations, and other social events can take on an entirely different perspective when you're living with a chronic condition.

Support groups offer an important forum to discover how others have managed with their digestive ailments, whether using traditional treatments or other newer therapies. Discussions about various diets and lifestyle changes are always popular.

While sharing experiences and empathizing with each other, participants often choose to focus on ways they have found to manage and overcome everyday challenges, but it is also okay to talk about the troubles you are facing. The groups follow a set of guidelines, which include listening in a respectful manner, refraining from judgment, and preserving confidentiality.

Our support group meetings offer a wealth of information to aid understanding for those newly diagnosed with a gastrointestinal disorder and for those who have lived with a condition for years. Coming to a support group provides an opportunity to share expertise and ease the disease experience of a more recently diagnosed patient. Plus, there's always a chance to learn something new!

Guidelines followed in our support groups

We strive to maintain a positive, friendly attitude within the groups that meet, remaining optimistic in the face of adversity.

All participants in the support group should be able to make these statements:

- I am in a group of individuals with a common bond, sharing my thoughts, concerns, feelings, experiences, strengths, and wisdom.
- I respect that all shared personal information remains confidential.
- Discussions foster positive attitudes, looking toward solutions.
- I share my problems, but I do not dwell on them.
- I listen, explore options, and express my feelings.
- I do not prescribe, diagnose, judge, or give medical advice.
- I do not try to sell treatments/other products in the group.
- I have the right not to use the recommendations of others.
- The facilitator is not a medical expert and most sharing of ideas will come from the group.
- I share equally with the other members of the group the responsibility for making the group run smoothly.
- We each have the opportunity for equal talking time or the choice to remain silent; we can share as much or as little as we want.
- I listen actively when someone is talking and avoid interrupting and engaging in side conversations.
- I will stick to my own experiences and will avoid generalities.
- The support group meetings supplement *and do not replace* medical care.

In addition to holding support groups, we publish patient information on a variety of digestive diseases and disorders and regularly host free, public BadGut® Lectures. Contact our office or visit our website for further information and look for us in social media.

Here's what some of our support group participants have to say:

"I never had so much enjoyment discussing my illness before! Lots of humour and support from people who really know and understand."

"I learn something new at each meeting. It's great to be able to talk to people who understand what you are going through."

"What a knowledgeable group of people! I've learned so much from two meetings...even fifteen years after being diagnosed."

About the Gastrointestinal Society

The GI (Gastrointestinal) Society is a registered Canadian charity committed to improving the lives of people with gastrointestinal and liver conditions, supporting research, advocating for appropriate patient access to healthcare, and promoting gastrointestinal and liver health.

Want to learn more on this subject? The *Inside Tract*®, the GI Society's quarterly newsletter, provides the latest on digestive and liver research, disease and disorder treatments (e.g., medications, nutrition), and a whole lot more. If you have any kind of digestive problem, then you will want this timely, informative publication. **Subscribe today!**

This pamphlet was produced in partnership with the Canadian Society of Intestinal Research under the guidance of affiliated healthcare professionals. This document is not intended to replace the knowledge, diagnosis, or care of your physician. © GI Society 2020. All rights reserved.

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