

Coping With IBD

Children with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) face the challenge of an unpredictable and potentially embarrassing disease. They may be self-conscious about their symptoms or frequent visits to the bathroom, and they may fear being the target of “bathroom humor”.

In addition to embarrassing symptoms, effects such as short stature, delayed puberty, and simply having a chronic illness may contribute to feeling “different” from peers. These issues can lead to anxiety and depression. A psychologist or social worker may be able to help address these issues and provide guidance and coping strategies. It is recommended that every IBD patient meet with a psychologist to assess specific needs.

Participation in school and social activities may be negatively affected by the disease. IBD patients can have lower educational achievement levels than their peers, including driver’s license and graduation rates. This difference can be addressed by using 504 Education Plans to provide appropriate accommodations for patients with IBD. A 504 Plan can continue through college to allow for similar accommodations there.

IBD has the potential to impact the ability to engage in daily activities and relationships with others, known as psychosocial functioning. Children with IBD appear to be at risk for more difficulties in psychosocial functioning than healthy children, although the problem requires clinical intervention in only some children. Difficulties experienced by children with IBD are generally similar to those with other chronic health conditions. For behavioral/emotional functioning, mood and anxiety disorders are most common.

Disease-specific camp programs can lessen these effects, including by improving relationships toward peers and self-confidence, among other social and emotional benefits. Finally, it is important that patients with IBD be evaluated and discuss with their gastroenterologist if they note issues such as those described above. Their gastroenterologist might provide a referral to a psychologist, social worker, or other behavioral health specialist. Addressing these issues can help improve adherence to medications and positive outcomes in patients with IBD.

Edited by Athos Bousvaros, April 2020



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IMPORTANT REMINDER: This information from the North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (NASPGHAN) is intended only to provide general educational information as a definitive basis for diagnosis or treatment in any particular case. It is very important that you consult your doctor about your specific condition.

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