



INFORMATION SHEET

COUNSELLING FOR IBD

INTRODUCTION

If you have Crohn's Disease or Ulcerative Colitis – the two best known forms of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) – at times you may find that your illness has a considerable impact on your life and emotional well being. In this case, you may find it helpful to talk to a counsellor. This information sheet looks at what is usually meant by counselling, how it may be able to help you, and ways to find a counsellor or therapist.

WHAT IS COUNSELLING?

Counselling is a 'talking therapy'. It offers you an opportunity to talk about yourself in a way that you would not normally do with friends and family. It provides a safe confidential place in which you can talk about anything which is of concern to you. Counsellors are specially trained to listen to you carefully. They will not judge you or tell you what to do, but should listen to what you are saying, and help you make sense of your world by exploring your thoughts and feelings. They will try and understand the issues which are causing you concern, and help you to find ways of coping with them.

Sometimes counselling may be referred to as psychotherapy. The two words are often used to mean the same thing, and many people use the terms interchangeably. Also, the word 'therapy' can be used to describe both counselling and psychotherapy. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) defines counselling and psychotherapy as 'umbrella' terms that cover a range of talking therapies.



Counselling has helped me to accept the negative feelings I had about my condition. It made me see that my illness is something to live with but must not define who I am. Through counselling I found the strength to be more assertive at work in requesting reasonable adjustments without feeling that I was making unreasonable requests.

ARE THERE DIFFERENT KINDS OF COUNSELLING?

There are many different types of counselling or talking therapy. Examples include Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), person-centred therapy, psychodynamic therapy, and mindfulness therapy. Different therapists will have had different training, and will have different ways of working with people. Some will use one type of therapy, others may incorporate techniques from several different forms of therapy. There is currently no evidence that one method will be more suitable than another for people with IBD. Also, many therapists believe that the strength of the 'relationship' between you and the therapist matters more than the type of therapy used.



Counselling may also be delivered in different ways, for example, it can be one-to-one, in groups, as a family, or as a couple. It can take place face to face, by telephone, or online.

More information about different types of therapy can be obtained from organisations such as the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), and the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapists (UKCP) (See **Other Organisations**).

HOW CAN COUNSELLING HELP ME?

Being diagnosed with a long-term illness can trigger many different emotions. You may feel shocked, scared, angry or depressed. Not knowing what might happen in the future may make you feel helpless and uncertain. You may even have feelings of guilt. However, these feelings are not uncommon. Many people with IBD experience such feelings from time to time, and some people find it helps to talk them through with someone else.

For some, talking over their worries with a friend or family member is enough, but for others it can be very helpful to talk to someone who is not emotionally attached, and can look at things from a different perspective. A professional counsellor can do this.

Some people may find it difficult or embarrassing to talk to someone about their feelings. Or, they may worry that seeking counselling might be seen as a sign of 'weakness'. However, a more positive way at looking at this could be that they have acknowledged their difficulties, and are taking responsibility for resolving these. Seeking help takes honesty and courage. Taking action in this way can help you to feel more in control of your life and the difficulties of living with IBD.

While counselling does not remove the disease, it may help you to feel stronger despite having the condition. The counsellor can offer you support and encouragement in trying to disentangle your problems, and examine the way you see your illness and its impact on your life.

You may find counselling helpful whether you are newly diagnosed, or have been living with IBD for some time. It may be particularly useful if you have recently had, or are preparing for, surgery. Young people may also find counselling very helpful in coming to terms with their condition.

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In my experience, admitting the “need” for counselling is a significant part of the process. It’s not an instant transformation, and you’ll still have bad as well as good days. But I found it a good outlet to talk about the issues that I didn’t feel comfortable discussing outside. It has definitely helped me get through periods of struggle with my condition.

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CAN COUNSELLING HELP REDUCE STRESS?

Many people with IBD feel that stress plays a role in their symptoms. Research also suggests that stress may trigger flare-ups or exacerbate symptoms. Although the evidence is limited, some people with IBD have found that their IBD and psychological well-being improved after counselling.

HOW CAN I FIND/ACCESS A COUNSELLOR?

There are a number of different ways to find a counsellor:

- **Your GP**

It is worth asking your own doctor about counselling first, as your GP surgery may employ a counsellor. If not, your GP may be able to refer you to other counselling services which are also provided by the NHS. However, there is often quite a long waiting list for NHS counselling. A small number of hospital IBD clinics may be also able to provide access to counselling or psychological support.

• **Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT)**

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) is an NHS service rolling out over England offering therapies to help people with anxiety and depression. This is part of a government policy to make counselling and other psychological treatments more easily available on the NHS. In some areas of the country, it may be possible to self-refer yourself through a Single Point of Access (SPA) which means you do not need to go through your GP if you do not want to. (See **Other Organisations** for more details).

• **Employer, university or college**

Another possible source of free counselling may be through your employer, if you are working, or your university or college, if you are a student.

• **Local Voluntary Sector Services**

You may find there are local voluntary sector counselling services, which you can approach directly. Such agencies may offer free counselling, or charge according to your income. However, there is often a waiting list. You could check your local phone book for a list of counselling organisations. You could also contact your library or local Citizens Advice Bureau, who may be able to help.

• **Private counselling**

If you want to see a private counsellor, you will be charged a fee, but some may offer reduced rates if you are on a low income or claiming benefits. One advantage can be that you are able to choose someone who can see you immediately. However, there are currently no laws covering who can call themselves 'a counsellor' – it is important to check that they are a member of a professional body such as the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) or the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP). Both of these organisations have lists and contact details for professionally accredited counsellors and therapists who have agreed to practise according to a 'Code of Ethics and Practice'. Both BACP and UKCP have a complaints procedure. They also provide guidance on how to choose a counsellor or psychotherapist. See **Other Organisations** for their contact details.

• **Private Health Cover**

If you have private health cover, you may be able to access counselling through your provider. The number of counselling sessions you can have may depend on the type of provider plan you are on.

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WHAT HAPPENS ONCE I HAVE FOUND A COUNSELLOR?

Your first contact with any counsellor or therapist will probably be by telephone, although you may be able to contact some by email. You can explain some of your reasons for seeking counselling, so that you and the counsellor can work out whether they may be able to help you.

Counsellors will expect you to have questions, so feel free to ask them any you may have. In particular, you may wish to ask about their experience, for example, if they specialise in particular problems or have helped people with similar problems to you before. Some counsellors specialise in helping people with long term illnesses, and you may find this type of experience especially relevant.

Other things you might like to discuss include:

- The type of counselling that will be used
- Where the sessions will take place
- The frequency and number of possible sessions
- The cost of each session if relevant
- Arrangements for cancellation, for example if you cannot make an appointment at short notice.

COUNSELLING FOR IBD

You may wish to ask for a written agreement that includes the cost (if relevant) and number of sessions you might have. Some counsellors may suggest having a preliminary meeting. This meeting will allow you to become acquainted with the counsellor, and to decide whether you want to continue working with them. You may want to check whether there would be any charge for this meeting.

The first meeting should give you the opportunity to decide whether it is worthwhile entering into a counselling 'relationship' with this counsellor. A good relationship with your therapist is one of the key things which determine whether the counselling is successful. This is why it is important that you have confidence in your counsellor, and that you feel comfortable talking about all aspects of your illness with them. If you feel any hesitation about the counsellor, or if the relationship is not working out as you would like, you do not have to continue with them, and should be free to start afresh with another counsellor.

WHERE CAN I FIND OTHER FORMS OF SUPPORT?

Your health team may include a specialist IBD nurse. Specialist nurses often provide considerable support and usually have a phone number you can contact them on.

You could also call our supportive listening service, Crohn's and Colitis Support, to talk to one of our trained volunteers with personal experience of IBD. (See below for more details.)

HELP AND SUPPORT FROM CROHN'S AND COLITIS UK

All our information sheets and booklets are available to download from our website: www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk.
For a printed copy, please contact our information line.

Crohn's and Colitis UK Information Line: 0300 222 5700. Open Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm, except Thursday open 9 am to 1 pm, and excluding English bank holidays. An answer phone and call back service operates outside these hours. You can also contact the service by email info@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk or letter (addressed to our St Albans office). Trained Information Officers provide callers with clear and balanced information on a wide range of issues relating to IBD.

Crohn's and Colitis Support: 0121 7379 931. Open Monday to Friday, 1pm to 3.30pm and 6.30pm to 9pm, excluding English bank holidays. This is a confidential, supportive listening service, which is provided by trained volunteers and available to anyone affected by IBD. These volunteers are skilled in providing emotional support to anyone who needs a safe place to talk about living with IBD.

OTHER ORGANISATIONS

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy: www.bacp.co.uk
01455 883300

United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy: www.ukcp.org.uk
020 7014 9955

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT): www.iapt.nhs.uk

British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)
www.babcp.com

British Psychoanalytic Council (BPC)
www.psychoanalytic-council.org
020 7561 9240

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Counselling for IBD Ed 4
Last review: March 2014
Contact details updated: March 2016
Next planned review: 2016

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We hope that you have found this leaflet helpful and relevant. If you would like more information about the sources of evidence on which it is based, or details of any conflicts of interest, or if you have any comments or suggestions for improvements, please email the Publications Team at publications@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk. You can also write to us at Crohn's and Colitis UK, 45 Grosvenor Road, St Albans, AL1 3AW or contact us through the **Information Line: 0300 222 5700**.

ABOUT CROHN'S & COLITIS UK

We are a **national** charity established in 1979. Our aim is to improve life for anyone affected by Inflammatory Bowel Diseases. We have over 28,000 members and 50 Local groups throughout the UK. Membership costs start from £15 per year with concessionary rates for anyone experiencing financial hardship or on a low income.

This publication is available free of charge, but we would not be able to do this without our supporters and members. Please consider making a donation or becoming a member of Crohn's and Colitis UK. To find out how call **01727 734465** or visit www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk

