

Crohn's Disease Tips: Living With Crohn's (1st Edition)

By: R. Wheeler

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Part 1: Introduction

I've been living with Crohn's for many years, but only recently received an official diagnosis. When that happened, the first thing I did was try and hunt down some books which would provide helpful advice for dealing with Crohn's disease. So far I've found several books with medical information including treatments, as well as a few recipe books. But I haven't found much information on dealing with the day-to-day living with Crohn's that so many of us are facing. So, I thought I would share some of the things I've learned so far, here in this free e-guide.

About Crohn's Disease And IBD

Inflammatory bowel disease, or IBD, describes two similar yet distinct conditions called Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. These diseases affect the digestive system and there is no known cause or cure for IBD.

Most people experience periods of remission and flare-ups of the disease, often requiring long-term medication, hospitalization or surgery. Although IBD is found throughout the world, it seems to be more common in North America and northern Europe.

Source: www.ccfcc.ca

Knowing Yourself

It seems to me, that the first step in helping yourself, is to know yourself. Really know. That means recognizing your positive attributes and your negative ones. It means seeing

how you live your life- what's important to you, and what is maybe being neglected. From what I've seen in myself and other people, including what I've read, there tends to be four main categories under which our various activities can be grouped. These are the often mentioned: physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. I've noticed that each person gives more or less attention and focus to certain groups over others. The great thing is that this is what makes us all unique- none of these groups are better than the others.

For example, my brother is definitely physically focused. He's a personal trainer and the condition of his body is very important to him. He enjoys exercise, is very careful about what he puts in his body and he always dresses very well. He loves to learn about nutrition, fitness and health. He's very knowledgeable about these topics and his career as a personal trainer is perfect for him. This area is what makes him happy.

On the other hand, I definitely put my intellectual side first. I read a lot and love to learn. I'm drawn toward activities that are interesting or informative. I tend to fill my spare time with activities that are mentally stimulating or interesting: like reading, and various projects. My most neglected side is physical. Although I'm thin, I consider myself to be a bit out of shape- no endurance at all. Every time I try to start a new workout plan, I lose interest.

I imagine people live their lives with their various focuses in a sort of diamond shape. At the top is your primary focus, at the bottom is the least one and the two others are somewhat even around the middle. Or maybe one is higher than the other. Mine looks kind of like this:



This diagram also gives some points that fall under each category to give you more of an idea of how I imagine the categories are split up. Your diamond might be a totally different shape- you might have two primary focuses. It doesn't even have to look like a diamond.

The point of all this, if you're still with me, is to make sure that you are giving all four areas of your life some attention. For example, I almost always neglect my physical side, and my emotional side sometimes gets short changed. For example when I get so caught up in my own projects and busyness that I haven't seen my friends in a while. What I'm trying to say is that while various areas of your life may be more important to you, and may receive most of your attention, you must take care of all these aspects of yourself to be happy and healthy. Crohn's disease, or any chronic illness can affect all these areas of our lives, and we can sometimes become so focused on our disease, that the areas of our lives that were already at the bottom of the totem pole are neglected even more.

While my recent battles with Crohn's have brought me closer to my friends and loved ones, giving my emotional side a new increase in attention, my physical side is still left out in the cold. Which is why I'm now trying to focus on light exercise and a well-rounded diet.

With a chronic illness, we need to be very careful to find a balance between taking care of ourselves physically, and not becoming overly obsessed or depressed about our physical troubles or difficulties. When you're in pain or running to the washroom a dozen times a day, it can be frighteningly hard to think about anything else- but the key is to do it in small steps.

This e-guide will contain various tips grouped under each of the 4 categories I've discussed. Thanks for reading, and in the meantime, take a moment to think about the areas of your life diamond- write it down. What's important to you? What gets neglected? What do you enjoy and what do you avoid? Where do you know you want to improve? The answers to these questions are different for each person. These tips are not a cure and do not replace medical treatment, but they do aim to help you live with this disease- so that you can get past having your life on pause due to Crohn's and you can instead give at least some of your attention to the rest of your life- and finding the right balance.

Part 2: The Physical Side of Crohn's

Anyone suffering a physical illness can attest to the fact that physical problems and issues are first and foremost in their minds. Sometimes we can get so caught up in caring for our beleaguered bodies that we put the rest of our lives on the back burner. Pain is a hard thing to ignore. Crohn's pain is a complicated beast to tame, and since there is no cure for Crohn's, it can become a question of managing rather than eliminating it. This can be disheartening, but luckily there are options- both medical and otherwise. In this section of my Crohn's Tips series I will list some suggestions, tips and strategies for dealing with

the physical effects of Crohn's. Some of these you have probably read countless times, but hopefully a few will be new and helpful.

- **Get a pit bull of a doctor:** Make sure your gastroenterologist is giving you all the tests available to diagnose your condition, and is trying out the many therapies available to you: drugs, diet, surgery and more. "It's all in your head." and "You'll just have to live like this." are not acceptable answers. Discuss medications for pain and diarrhea. If your doctor is not a go-getter then get another one, or insist on the tests and treatments yourself. This point can make all the difference.
- **Follow your prescriptions:** When we start feeling well it can be tempting to stop taking our maintenance medication. I've heard a number of people's stories that begin with: "I was feeling pretty good so I wasn't taking my medication regularly, but then...". These drugs are meant to be effective if taken as prescribed. Not if taken randomly or once in a while. If you are interested in stopping your medication, consult with your doctor first. It can be dangerous to take your medication in any way other than by following the prescription, this can be especially true with antibiotics which must run their full course.
- **Take the pain meds:** When I was first diagnosed and suffering with pain in the 8-9 out of 10 range I was rarely taking the pain medication I was prescribed. Somehow I thought that would be giving in, or crossing an invisible line into being 'really' sick. My doctor, nurse, boyfriend and family all convinced me I was being a fool. Now I'm not afraid to take the pain-relievers if I need it. It's about quality of life. Be smart though: only take what you are prescribed and follow the directions carefully. Pain medication can be habit forming. Tell your doctor what you've been needing to take.
- **Ask about pain management:** There's no reason to be suffering from chronic pain without exhausting all your options. Your doctor can refer you to a Chronic Pain Specialist who can suggest more strategies than just pain medication. These include a beneficial diet, exercise, techniques like heating pads and more. You may also want to explore homoeopathic treatments like massage and aroma therapies, meditation, acupuncture/pressure, herbal remedies and more. Don't accept "live with it" as an answer. The website www.pain.com has a variety of information about dealing with pain and a search form for pain clinics in your area.
- **Know yourself:** Be aware of which sensations and symptoms are 'normal' for you. If your pain level or any other physical quality changes you'll be able to recognize it and inform your doctor. For example, pain related to your Crohn's may be familiar right now, but new abdominal pains are not necessarily just more of the same and should be reported to your doctor. Your normal is not the same as other people's normal.
- **Eat:** While eating can trigger your symptoms, avoiding food is not an option. Eat what you can as often as you can. Make maintaining your body weight a priority.

Your body is trying to do its best to fight off the problems- it needs fuel to do so. Had surgery? Increase your protein intake to help heal your wounds. Talk to a dietician to make sure you're getting the proper nutrients. Talk to your doctor about the possible need for supplements. During the times when you're feeling well, cook in bulk. You can cook a dozen pork chops or chicken breasts and freeze them after cooking; then take them out as needed, add some water and microwave. A healthier 'frozen dinner' than the boxed kind- and cheaper!

- **Keep a symptom journal:** Buy a notebook and each day write down exactly what you eat, your symptoms, pain (intensity and location), describe your bowel movements and frequency and times. Record your stress levels and fatigue levels as these can have an effect. This journal can be vital in finding triggers for your worst symptoms. Bring it to your doctor too because this can help him/her to treat you. The value of this journal can't be underestimated- it's how I discovered that dairy was a primary trigger for me- but the symptoms didn't show up until 2 days *after* eating dairy. I would never have clued in if I had not seen the pattern on paper.
- **Ask for help:** Can't lift that big jug of water? Feeling too exhausted to grocery shop? Just need someone to hold your hand or make you some soup? Ask for help- you'd be surprised how quickly your friends and family step in. Someday you can return the favour.
- **Simplify your life:** Too much busyness can be exhausting and can worsen your symptoms. Know what is important and what isn't. Each day try to tackle the most important of tasks and don't stress about the rest. If the garden doesn't get weeded, or the Christmas decorations stay up a little longer, it's not the end of the world.
- **Take lots of me time:** You may be a parent. Or a business person. Or a member of a team or club or other group. Don't let your obligations stop you from having a lot of down time. Just read a book or watch some TV. Take an extra nap. Fatigue and stress can amplify your Crohn's symptoms- so make sure you unwind- often. Learn to say no. It's not selfish to take care of yourself.
- **Get enough sleep:** Your body is fighting a war, and you need sleep. Fatigue can amplify your symptoms and make you miserable. Make sure you're going to bed early enough- trust me... that TV show is not more important than your sleep. Make this a priority. It will improve your ability to function during your waking hours.
- **Buy a hot water bottle or heating pad:** Warmth on your abdomen can soothe pain and discomfort. The rubber water bottles you fill from the tap are my personal favourite. They can relax muscles, calm your digestive system and help you fall asleep. A cheap, versatile tool. A warm bath or shower can help too, especially for people dealing with fissures.

- **Make an ERPK:** An Emergency Roadside Potty Kit. This tip was provided by Crohn's blogger Jenni. Keep a pail, some plastic bags, wipes, sanitizer, toilet paper and extra underwear in your car for long trips- it may not be a pleasant thought, but better safe than sorry.
- **Keep moving:** Try to do what little exercise you can. Go for a short walk down the street or just around your room. Stretch gently. Keeping your body healthy overall will help speed your recovery time from surgeries and help your body fight infection. Our bodies were built to move so even if your digestive system is out of whack- at least the rest of your body can be in good shape. Take it easy and only do what you can physically handle. Check with your doctor before doing strenuous exercise.
- **Buy some comfortable clothes:** Before I had Crohn's the only pants I owned were jeans, PJs and dress pants. That didn't give me very good options for the times I was in the hospital or recovering from surgery. Buying some soft, loose, comfortable athletic pants and some soft long sleeve shirts meant that at least my skin was feeling good, and I didn't look terrible either. Trust me- you deserve this. What other people think is irrelevant.
- **Buy the expensive toilet paper:** Do not skimp. Get the ultra soft. Seriously, you deserve it. Oh, and a small dab of petroleum jelly (Vaseline) used *externally* can help with rawness.
- **Discuss your Crohn's with your significant other:** Pain, drug side effects, bathroom trips and more can all put a damper on intimacy. Make sure your partner is aware of your fears, concerns and self-consciousness- so that he or she knows it's not their fault you feel less than eager. Hopefully together you can work through it and handle any bumps along the way. There are also a number of items like waist bands to tastefully conceal external appliances like stomas.
- **Know where the washrooms are:** Most Crohn's sufferers do this by instinct. Mentally map out the locations of washrooms when you go to a new place. Avoid places that have no washroom facilities, and bring some anti-diarrhea medication with you at all times.
- **Keep a couple personal travel wipes with you:** You can often find these hygienic wipes marketed to women, but guys- trust me you'll love 'em too. It's nice to feel fresh when needed, especially before some impromptu intimacy.
- **Keep your medical information in your wallet:** Write down your Crohn's diagnosis, current medications, recent surgeries, doctor and emergency contact numbers along with any allergies, and keep it in your wallet. You never know when it may be needed.

When you are first diagnosed and in the middle of a painful flare-up, it's easy to start asking "Why is my body doing this to me?", and to start feeling like you're at war with yourself. Don't get trapped into this outlook. Your body is your vehicle for your life and it's the only one you've got. It's trying its best to fight off the problem, but just can't do it. Take care of your body as well as you can- if you smoke, get some help to quit. If you drink, cut back or stop completely. Get what little exercise you can manage, and eat healthy foods that don't trigger your symptoms.

Learn to listen to what your body is telling you. We get constant signals from our bodies telling us when we are thirsty, hungry, tired or sore. Telling us when certain foods disagree with us or when we feel the urge to get up and get moving. Our bodies tell us when they are full, and when they are hurting. Somehow, society has created a trend where we ignore what our bodies are telling us. We keep eating when we're full, we stay up when we're tired. You know what I'm talking about. Learn to pay attention to your body's signals, feelings and appearance; so you can know what's normal for you, so you can recognize symptoms earlier.

Our digestive systems might be having a rough time- but don't forget that the rest of your body needs to be taken care of too. In addition to treating your body right... don't forget to spoil yourself once in a while. Maybe that means a nice long bath or an extra nap. Or maybe a manicure or a massage. Whatever you're going through, don't let it become a battle with your body which can lead to a slippery slope of self-loathing. Remember that it's not all bad and that with careful attention to your physical well-being, your Crohn's can be managed and you can live a full life.

Part 3: The Intellectual Side of Crohn's

Taking a smart approach to your chronic illness can have real benefits for you, both mentally and physically. The bad news is that you can't cure yourself, but the good news is that you can turn having Crohn's from a scary and confusing situation, to a manageable bump in the road. You can go from being a victim, to living a full, happy life. This section contains tips for things you can do from an intellectual perspective, including learning, organizing and acceptance.

- **Learn the facts:** The very first thing you should do is eliminate any confusion or general questions you might have, and take away some of the ominous mystery of your diagnosis by learning everything you can from *reputable* sources. Go to your local library or bookstore and pick up some factual books about Crohn's Disease such as *Crohn's and Colitis: Understanding the Facts About IBD* by Hillary Steinhart. Knowing what it is, the treatment options, and what is ahead of you can help you face and accept your situation. It's probably not as scary as you thought, and will keep your imagination from inflating your worries.

- **Avoid sketchy information:** There are a lot of websites out there that claim to know how to cure you. Special diets, miracle vitamins and other unproven 'solutions'; but there is currently no real cure. Make sure you know the difference between reliable websites and books, and those which are pushing an agenda or product. Always get your information from multiple sources to be sure about it, and then check with your doctor before taking any action, trying any diet, or taking any vitamins or medication. Also be aware that spending too much time on forums and blogs can leave you with the impression that there is no light at the end of the tunnel. Remember: people who feel awful may want to post on forums, but people who feel great might be too busy to post their success stories; so online, Crohn's Disease may seem worse than it is.
- **Keep a personal medical binder:** In this binder keep all your medical information, such as:
 - Information sheets from the pharmacy about your medications.
 - A list of your doctors and their contact information.
 - Your current medications and vitamins.
 - Medical sheets and forms about hospital stays and surgeries.
 - Summary of what your doctors told you during each meeting.

Write down a list of questions for your next doctor visit. Make sure your doctor doesn't rush through your appointment before all your questions have been answered. When you get home from a doctor visit, record everything you remember that he or she told you (or bring your binder to the appointment and jot down notes while you're there). Keep a symptom journal and record what you eat, how you feel, your pain level, temperature, washroom trips and irregular medications you had to take. This may seem silly, but having it all together in one binder or folder will be a lifesaver when you're trying to remember whether some feeling is a symptom of one of your medications and whether it's serious or not. It also helps to recall the advice of your doctors long after you would have forgotten, or to watch for a pattern of symptoms or worsening pain. Once I was brought to the hospital in an ambulance and had the sense to bring the binder with me. It helped to speed up my admission to the ER because the admitting nurse could fill out my paperwork quickly from my binder notes, rather than ask me questions through the morphine haze.

- **Keep your medical information in your wallet:** Keep a folded sheet of paper in a visible spot in your wallet that says Medical Alert on the outside. Inside record your emergency contacts, doctors, medications and allergies. Also record your diagnosis of Crohn's Disease and any recent surgeries. Consider purchasing a Medical Alert bracelet or necklace. Also give this information to a loved one in case it's needed.
- **Keep your medical receipts:** You may be able to claim medical expenses on your income taxes. Americans will also want to submit information regarding any

HSA (Health Savings Account) or medical FSA (Flexible Spending Account) to their tax accountant.

- **Watch your state of mind:** Keep an eye on your thoughts. Are you making problems seem bigger than they are, or are you ignoring serious issues? Are you following the advice of your doctor? Are you sadder than usual or possibly depressed? Are you avoiding the situation or refusing to ask for help?
- **Remember to be thankful:** Every single person (that includes you!) has something to be thankful for. In the thick of a Crohn's flare up it can be hard to remember that there is more to life than pain, washrooms and food you can't eat. Stop for a moment to make a list of all the good things and people in your life. Compliment yourself. Try not to let your Crohn's Disease taint the rest of your life too.
- **Accept yourself:** You have Crohn's Disease. That is a part of you, but it's not all there is to you. Accept what you can't change and gather the determination to make the best of the precious life you have. Mental attitude can mean the difference between misery and happiness. Look in the mirror and vow to live life as fully as you are able, and to find joy where you can. When Crohn's gets in your way, take things one day at a time and you'll get through it.
- **Help find a cure:** Check out the [CCFA \(www.ccfa.org\)](http://www.ccfa.org) or [CCFC \(www.cfca.ca\)](http://www.cfca.ca) websites to learn how you can get involved with helping to fund research, raise awareness, or support others in your community. Every little bit helps.
- **Have fun:** Make sure you aren't thinking about your disease all the time. It can gnaw at the back of your mind constantly. Don't let yourself get caught up in this pattern. Take a break and relax. Talk to friends. Do something you enjoy. Watch a movie. If your mind is constantly churning, try techniques like meditation, journaling, or talk therapy to clear your thoughts and refocus yourself.

Having a chronic disease can be scary. But being smart, organized and accepting can clear the confusion and reduce or eliminate your fear.

Part 4: The Emotional Side of Crohn's

The emotional effects of Crohn's can often be just as devastating as the physical ones, and a diagnosis is scary and confusing for many people. Fear about treatments and outlook, uncertainty about what your future will hold and embarrassment about the effects and symptoms all jumble together and can hit a new Crohn's sufferer hard. This is a challenging disease, made harder by a stigma surrounding bowel diseases that is thankfully starting to be lifted. People are becoming more open and honest about the conditions they suffer with and those around us are becoming more understanding of the

various ailments and disabilities that affect their friends, coworkers and neighbours. While Crohn's Disease can hit you emotionally like a ton of bricks, there is good news and hope- starting with the fact that Crohn's is not a terminal disease, it is treatable and manageable and you can still live a happy and productive life.

The first step to dealing emotionally with Crohn's is to gather a support network of loved ones and professionals around you. Step two is to take charge of your situation by learning and following treatment plans. Step three is to make sure you are viewing your situation realistically and not losing sight of all your blessings under the shadow of this new looming problem.

You *can* do it. There are many people living dynamic and happy lives even with a diagnosis of Crohn's Disease. Take football player David Garrard, he was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease in 2004 and it has not put a stop to his career as quarterback for the NFL Jacksonville Jaguars. You can't get much more active and challenging than football. Stories like his are everywhere. Ask around and you'll often find stories of friends of friends who have Crohn's Disease or Ulcerative Colitis and more often than not, these people made it through their treatments and are doing well. The number one tip for the emotional side of coping with Crohn's is that you are in control of your own frame of mind. You can choose to be dire and depressed or you can choose to be positive and determined. Staying positive also reduces stress and anxiety- big aggravators of the disease.

Here is a list of specific tips and things to think about.

- **Turn to loved ones:** The people you love are an enormous source of help, support, encouragement and even distraction. Make sure your friends and family know what you're going through and don't be afraid to be frank about your need for a shoulder to cry on, an ear to vent to, or just a encouraging presence. You would be surprised how willing people are to help you. Helping others feels good and strengthens relationships. You can also stay alert for opportunities when you can return the favour by helping someone during their time of need. Many studies show that individuals with good support networks have shorter recovery times and report less severe symptoms.
- **Don't blame yourself:** Why me? It's not fair! I shouldn't have ate that. I over-stressed myself. What did I do to deserve this? Each of us has probably had these kinds of thoughts at least once, but you didn't give yourself Crohn's Disease no matter how stressed you are or what you eat. This isn't some kind of cosmic punishment even though it may feel like that sometimes. Try not to fall victim to this kind of thinking, and instead focus on the positives in your life, and be proactive in dealing with your disease.
- **Socialize:** It's so deceptively easy to become a recluse when you aren't feeling well. You try to hide your suffering, fearing the opinions of others, or maybe you're trying to protect loved ones from worrying about you. Maybe you don't want to be a bother or don't want to request that the group eats at a restaurant that

you can handle. Maybe you're just miserable and want to be left alone. Shutting the world out is a bad idea. The support of friends and family is vital, and a lot can be said for the welcome distraction and lift that a casual social engagement can involve. Suggest something appropriate to how well you feel, even if it's just a low key gathering at someone's house. At the very least, get on the phone and keep in touch. You don't have to go into details when people ask how you're doing, a short answer will suffice and you can politely avoid any personal questions you don't want to answer. The point is, stay connected. Loved ones are a life-line, in more ways than one.

- **Explain as much or as little as you want:** It can be awkward to try to explain why you have to avoid certain foods, or why you make frequent trips to the washroom. Luckily you get to decide how much or how little information you want to give out. It might ease your anxiety if people know a little bit about what you're dealing with, or you might want to keep it to yourself. You get to decide on where that boundary lies.
- **Observe yourself:** Keeping an eye on your own emotions can be a source of encouragement and also help you catch yourself if you start to sink into a depression. I have found that keeping a personal journal is very therapeutic- it allows me to see how far I've come, recall things I've vowed to do when I feel better, catch myself being too self-critical, and recall times when I had a lot of fun. It can be very helpful to pour out your feelings, raw and uncensored, to a journal which won't judge you. It can also help you emotionally prepare for things like surgeries or to hash out what's been bothering you. If journaling doesn't appeal to you, try setting aside a few minutes each day or each week for some self reflection. Make sure you aren't losing site of the big picture and all the great things you also have in your life.
- **Live when you can:** One of the most emotionally difficult things to deal with when going through a Crohn's flare-up is how it changes your life. You become physically unable to do the things you want to do or are used to doing, and you lose a lot of your independence and have to lean on loved ones for physical and emotional support. One of the most important things you can do for yourself, is to remember to do all those things you couldn't do, now that you feel well. Repay the kindness others have shown you, get out and move, exercise, vacation, make the most of the times when your disease is in remission or being managed. It's too easy to lament your inability to go outside for a bike ride when you aren't feeling well, and then get too busy or distracted to do it when you're well. Have no regrets, so you aren't cursing yourself during your next flare. This doubles as a physical tip, but the emotional benefits can't be overstated.

Part 5: The Spiritual Side of Crohn's

I'm betting there are a number of readers who are either wondering what this section will say, or doubting that it will be relevant to them. Especially those who are not religious such as Atheists might think they can skip this section completely. Instead, I ask you to give this a read, because religion and faith are only a small part of what this section will discuss. The spiritual side of your life also includes an examination of your values, your morals, and your overall philosophy of what's important and meaningful to you and what you want for yourself, your family and your future.

What does this have to do with Crohn's Disease specifically? Being diagnosed with a chronic illness can throw our outlook and priorities for a loop. We might feel like what used to be important no longer is, or the looming threat of a flare up or complication might be giving us a sense of urgency regarding finding a direction for our lives and living it to the fullest. Some of us might even be feeling scared and lost, no longer knowing what to hold on to or where our lives are headed. A chronic illness is a reminder of our mortality which can be a frightening, or an enlightening messenger. Here are some tips and things to consider.

- **Know what's important:** Examine your life and yourself and figure out what is most important to you. What do you value and what do you enjoy? What gives your life meaning? Make sure you are living a life that is in line with these things. Whether you are a businesswoman who wants to start a family, or an accountant who'd rather work with his hands there are many people who's lives are not in line with their values and this can cause stress, depression, and anxiety. If you are coping with Crohn's Disease, wouldn't it be better to do so within a life that brings you happiness?
- **Understand Crohn's Disease's role in your life:** You have Crohn's Disease, nothing can change that. However, the role that it has in your life is totally up to you. It can be a tragedy that brings you down, or a challenge that you face and overcome. You can be a victim or a survivor. You can merely cope, or you can shine. While the varying degree to which your particular case affects your life via pain, complications, surgeries and more is something you have very little control over, your own reactions and outlook regarding your situation is 100% up to you. It's not easy, but maintaining a positive frame of mind, focusing on your blessings, and living the best life you can are things you can find deep within yourself.
- **Don't neglect your faith:** Whether or not you attend church or practise at home, whether you believe in God or are unsure what's "out there", if religious faith is a part of your life it can be an enormous source of strength for you and your family. Now is the time to turn to a faith-community for support and guidance. Even if you don't believe in these things at all, the faith and beliefs of a friend or family

member can be a source of comfort and encouragement. Even just learning about another faith can help you determine what you personally believe.

- **Create a positive environment:** Make sure that the people and environment you are surrounding yourself with is one that is positive and helpful. We have all experienced the toxic attitudes of miserable people, or a crushing work or home environment. Learn to say no to people who are a physical or emotional drain on you and don't feel guilty for refusing to visit places or situations that make you uncomfortable or upset. These things can physically and emotionally aggravate an already sensitive Crohn's flare-up.
- **Observe yourself:** When we are suffering intense pain and fear it can easily be reflected in our own behaviour and interactions with others. Keep an eye on yourself and make sure you aren't taking out your troubles on those around you. Asking for help and turning to friends and family for a shoulder to cry on or an ear to vent to is not the same as being critical or snippy to those around us. Acting with compassion and kindness can also relieve your own tension and can show appreciation to helpful loved ones. Even the nurses in the hospital will appreciate a kind word and sincere thanks.
- **Get involved:** I know I've given this tip before, but volunteering and charity work can be rewarding by itself. Add to that, the fact that you now have at least one cause that affects you directly. The CCFC and CCFA are frequently organizing bike-a-thons, walk-a-thons, pasta dinners, fundraising drives and other activities to raise money for Crohn's and Colitis research. I personally find it kind of fun to donate in the name of trying to help cure myself! In addition there are many other organizations that could use the help, and getting involved will help keep your mind off of your chronic illness concerns, and help you feel less powerless.

Conclusion

Having Crohn's Disease can be painful, scary, confusing and challenging. It will test you in all kinds of ways, but you are not merely a victim. You have control over all the areas of your life: physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. Taking care of yourself is vitally important, and so is your frame of mind. You can choose to face this challenge head on, and be a fighter not a victim. Remember that your disease is not all there is to your life. Make a list of your blessings- write them down on a piece of paper to remind yourself of all the things you have to be thankful for. I bet you can find at least twenty good things in your life. Hold on to the people and things that are important, do everything you can to manage your disease, and refuse to let Crohn's Disease dictate your outlook. Your happiness comes from within.

Appendix A: Food Tips

Food can be a nightmarish struggle for people with Crohn's Disease, Ulcerative Colitis, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Ulcers and more. Often, just trying to find pre-made foods in the grocery store like soup is a struggle. I for example can't have anything acidic or with spices in it. That rules out *all* canned soups which contain seasonings, onion, MSG, you name it. Even the tins of broth are a problem. I also can't have any dairy which rules out a lot of things, so I've learned to be creative. Here are some tips I've learned over the years:

- Rice milk can be a good alternative to real milk for cereal, cooking and baking. If the vanilla variety is too sweet for you, try the original. Other variations you can try are soy milk (higher in protein), oat milk and almond milk. Try your alternative or organic food section in the grocery store to find these products. You can even get alternative milk shakes in flavours like chocolate and strawberry.
- There are a lot of soy products which are tasty in their own right. I've been enjoying Belsoy vanilla pudding and Yoso brand soy cream cheese.
- Always try substitutions. For example, if you can't stomach the spices or the fibre in the seaweed of sushi rolls, make them without spices and with rice-paper instead of seaweed wrapping.
- Experiment! Take a tasty looking recipe and substitute or remove ingredients that you can't have. You have nothing to lose but a little time, and in my experience it usually turns out great.
- Cook in bulk. Have food (especially meat) pre-cooked and frozen for days when you are feeling awful. For example, cook a dozen pork-chops in the oven. Let cool a bit then freeze them. You can then take one out as needed, add about a tablespoon of water on it, and microwave. Add some canned veggies and pasta, rice, bread or potato for a well rounded, healthy and easy meal.
- It's relatively easy to make your own broth as a base for soups, stews and gravy. Simply boil chicken breasts for about an hour till the chicken is fully cooked and the broth is clear-yellow. Strain out the chicken and freeze the broth in ice-cube trays to save for later use. Season to your own taste when you're ready to use it. Lots of salt will reproduce the taste of store broth. Cook a roast beef in your crock-pot (slow-cooker) and save the juices for broth. Keep in mind that you will want to let both chicken and beef broth sit in your fridge overnight so the grease hardens and floats to the top, then you can skim it off before using or freezing.
- Keep an eye on ingredients. Store bought items sometimes change their ingredient list, so always double check. Also if your stomach is bothered by acidic ingredients, keep in mind that many foods have citric acid as a preservative.

- If fibre causes you a problem, boiling or steaming your vegetables like carrots and spinach will soften them and make them easier to digest, but don't over boil or you'll lose all the nutrients. Also, red-meats are more fibrous than others.
- For your worst days, the following foods are *very* bland and easy on your system: white rice and pasta, cream of wheat, unseasoned chicken broth with grease removed, cucumber without skin, bananas, rice milk, weak caffeine free tea like green or peppermint. And always drink lots of water.
- Try to eat multiple smaller meals each day rather than a few large meals. Don't eat in a rush, and try not to drink a lot of liquids with your meal.

Appendix B: Links & Resources

Crohn's And Colitis Foundation of Canada

<http://www.ccfcc.ca>

Crohn's And Colitis Foundation of America

<http://www.cdfa.org>

New York Times Section on Crohn's Disease

<http://health.nytimes.com/health/guides/disease/crohns-disease/overview.html>

Everyday Health Section on Crohn's Disease

<http://www.everydayhealth.com/crohns-disease/index.aspx>

Mount Sinai Crohn's Disease Information

<http://www.mountsinai.org/Other/Diseases/Crohns%20disease>

Book: *Crohn's and Colitis: Understanding the Facts About IBD*

<https://www.amazon.ca/dp/0778801322?tag=brightsky-20>

Appendix C: About The Author and This E-Guide

Author

R. Wheeler is an IT professional living in Ontario, Canada. She suffered with I.B.S. symptoms for several years and was officially diagnosed with Crohn's Disease in August 2008. This free e-guide is dedicated to everyone suffering with Crohn's Disease or Ulcerative Colitis and their families and friends.

About This Guide

This free e-guide is meant to provide helpful suggestions for people suffering with IBD. It is not meant to replace the care and advice of a medical doctor. Please consult with your doctor before trying any new treatment, diet, or physical activity.

This e-guide is totally free, but if you enjoyed it and would like to show your appreciation, the author asks that you make a donation directly to the CCFA or CCFC and report that donation to a small fund raiser she's involved in so she can track the funds raised to date. Here: <http://www.brightsky.org/fundraiser-ccf.php>

To obtain the latest edition of this e-guide from the author, please go to: <http://www.brightsky.org/crohns-tips-guide/>

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