

# How to support a friend with Crohn's or Colitis

When you live with Crohn's or Colitis, the support of friends can mean a lot. Sometimes it can be invaluable. If you have a friend with the condition, they won't want their condition to get in the way of being friends and there's a lot you can do to help. We asked lots of young people aged 14-25 how Crohn's or Colitis affected their friendships.

Here's what we learned – and some top tips on how you can be a good friend.



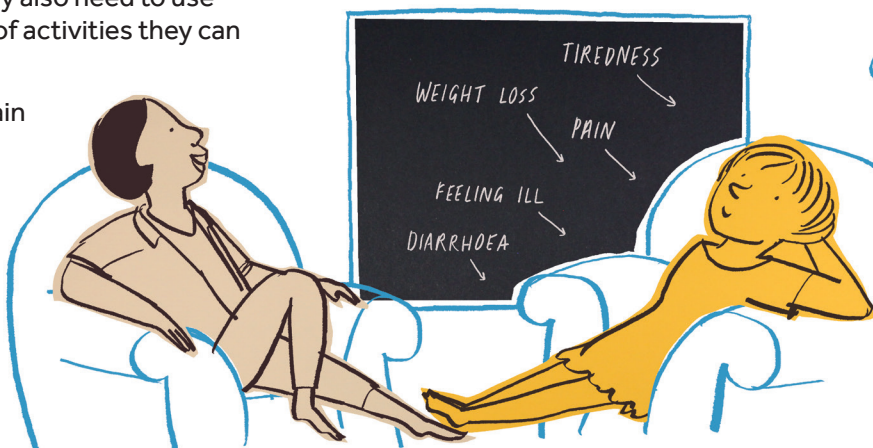
## What is Crohn's and Colitis all about?



- + Crohn's or Colitis is a condition that affects the digestive system – not to be confused with IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome).
- + Typically, people with Crohn's or Colitis get tummy pains, diarrhoea, loss of appetite and weight loss. They sometimes need to go to the toilet urgently, and can get very tired.
- + Both Crohn's and Colitis affect everyone differently and, at the moment, there is no cure, but people do sometimes have periods when they feel well and have very few symptoms, or none at all.
- + Your friend will probably be taking medicine to treat their condition. They may need a special diet and will have trips to the hospital for check-ups. Sometimes they may need to stay in hospital for treatment.
- + You can't catch the condition from your friend.

## How might having Crohn's or Colitis affect my friend?

- + Crohn's and Colitis are unpredictable, so your friend may feel fine one day and dreadful the next. This might mean they have to cancel or change plans, which can be disappointing for both of you.
- + Your friend may get very tired easily. They may also need to use the bathroom a lot. This can affect the kinds of activities they can do, and the kind of places they can go.
- + Your friend might find it hard at times to explain what it's like or how they are feeling. At other times they may find it easier and want to talk about their thoughts and situation.
- + Any long-term illness can get people down. It's only normal that your friend might feel anxious, lonely or depressed from time to time.



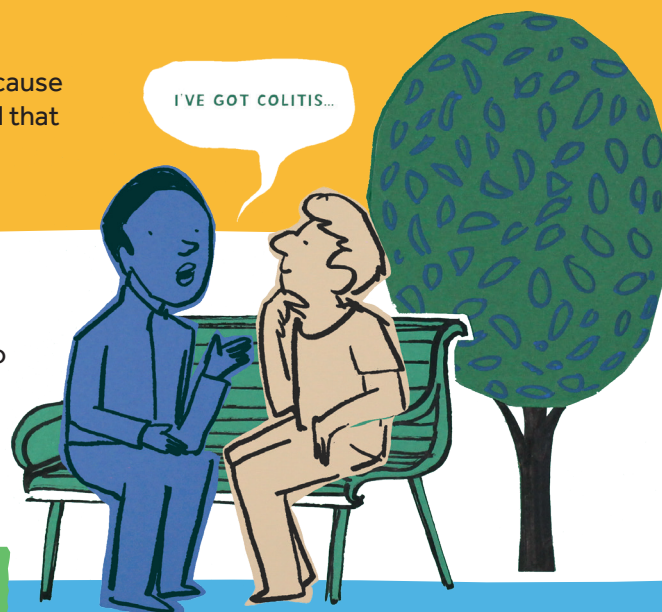
Having good friends can be one of the best ways for anyone with Crohn's or Colitis to get through hard times. Here's how you can help!

## Top tips

The chances are you would do many of these things anyway, just because they are what any friend would do but these tips should help you feel that bit more confident if you're unsure.

## Be a good listener

- ✦ Don't be afraid to ask your friend how they are feeling. But if they don't want to talk about it, tell them that's fine. It's nice for them to know that you're interested and will listen when they want to talk.
- ✦ Although your support will be brilliant, they may well want to forget about their condition and just get on with their life when they are with you.



## Make plans that work for you both



- ✦ Be flexible about what you do together. Sometimes they may want to stay in or do quieter activities, so try to think of ways to make this fun and keep your friend involved.
- ✦ It can really help to know where the toilets are when you go out!
- ✦ Sometimes your friend may have to cancel plans because they are exhausted or in pain. Cancelling plans may make them feel sad or guilty. Try and be as understanding as possible and keep them in the loop about things.

## Help them feel good

- ✦ If other people are unkind to your friend or don't understand, stick by your friend and support them.
- ✦ Think of ways to help them feel confident about themselves.
- ✦ If they are worried about telling certain people (like other friends, teachers, employers etc.), help them practice what they might say.
- ✦ Staying in touch with cheerful messages can really brighten up their day.



## Where can I find out more about Crohn's or Colitis?

- ✦ We've used our research to create an animation called **'Telling My Friends'** along with some information sheets: [www.ehu.ac.uk/crohnsorcolitis](http://www.ehu.ac.uk/crohnsorcolitis)
- ✦ There's lots of additional info on the Crohn's and Colitis UK website [www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/](http://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/) including another great animation [www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/about-crohns-and-colitis](http://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/about-crohns-and-colitis)
- ✦ Your friends can see exactly what it's like to have Crohn's or Colitis with the immersive **In My Shoes** app [www.ittakesguts.org.uk/share/in-my-shoes-app](http://www.ittakesguts.org.uk/share/in-my-shoes-app)
- ✦ Crohn's and Colitis UK's It Takes Guts website has lots of info, including a Talking Toolkit [www.ittakesguts.org.uk/talk/talking-toolkit](http://www.ittakesguts.org.uk/talk/talking-toolkit)

