

How to tell your friends about having Crohn's or Colitis

Lots of young people with Crohn's or Colitis worry about people finding out about their condition, and about how to tell their friends. We asked lots of young people aged 14-25 how they told their friends about having Crohn's or Colitis. Here's what we learned - and some top tips on how to do it yourself.



When is a good time to tell my friends?

- ✦ For some of the young people we spoke to, the right time was straight after diagnosis, while others took months or years to tell friends.
- ✦ Some people decided to open up when friends began guessing they might be unwell.
- ✦ Some chose to do it when they started a new phase of their life (such as a new school, college, university or workplace) or before going on holiday.

★ Top tip ★

Listen to your instincts and trust yourself. You will hopefully know when the time feels right for you.



What should I say?

- ✦ Most young people we spoke to said they didn't want to make a big thing of their condition when telling their friends.
- ✦ Most said they don't tell their friends every detail - a little information goes a long way.
- ✦ Some said they explained how their friends could be supportive, such as keeping in touch, and the sorts of activities they could join in with even when they were feeling poorly.



★ Top tip ★

What you share with your friends is up to you. Starting with a little information then perhaps adding more later, can be a good way to go.

How do I go about telling my friends?



- + Understandably, many young people found it a bit awkward or embarrassing at first.
- + Some said they found it helpful to practice or make notes beforehand, so they knew exactly what to say.
- + Most told their friends face-to-face, but some told their friends using social media.
- + Most young people said they found it helpful to tell their trusted friends first.

★ Top tip ★

There are lots of ways to tell friends about your condition. When you are ready, think about these options and decide what feels best for you.

What are the upsides of telling my friends?

- + Most young people said that their real friends were supportive and their friendships actually got stronger because of it.
- + Generally, friends understood that sometimes they were too tired to go out and worked around it so they could still have fun.
- + Friends who kept in touch played an important role in cheering them up when they felt down about their condition.

★ Top tip ★

Most people found telling their friends was a good thing and that those friends were glad to help.



Are there any downsides to telling my friends?



- + Different friends can respond differently, so it's hard to know until you do it.
- + Some young people did say that certain friends weren't sensitive.
- + Sometimes friends may drift away or say insensitive things that you find upsetting.
- + Some may not believe that Crohn's or Colitis can make you really poorly.

★ Top tip ★

Usually people are kind, but it's good to be prepared in case they're not. Some friends may need a bit more time to get used to the news than others.

Where can my friends 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
- + There's lots of additional info on the Crohn's and Colitis UK website www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/ including another great animation 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
- + 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

