

Navigating IBD in the Workplace

What Is Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)?

IBD is an umbrella term for chronic inflammatory conditions affecting the gastrointestinal (GI) tract.

The two most common forms are:



Ulcerative Colitis (UC)

Affects the colon and rectum, involving continuous inflammation



Crohn's Disease

Can affect any part of the GI tract and deeper layers of the bowel

Did you know?



- In Canada, ~322,000 people live with IBD
- Rates are among the highest globally

IBD Symptoms

- Abdominal pain
- Chronic diarrhea
- Waking overnight to have a bowel movement
- Rectal bleeding
- Bloating & gas
- Weight loss
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Anemia
- Anxiety and depression

One of the most disruptive symptoms is **bowel urgency**. In a work setting, this can:

Interrupt meetings or tasks

Limit participation in certain roles or environments

Anxiety about being away from a washroom

Lead to embarrassment or stigma



Does Crohn's or Colitis Affect a Person's Ability to Work?

Short answer: **it can – but it doesn't have to define it.**

During flares, symptoms may temporarily limit work capacity. During remission, many people function with minimal disruption.

How Is IBD Treated?

While there is no cure for IBD, effective treatment strategies can help control inflammation, reduce symptoms, and maintain remission.

Medications to manage



- Anti-inflammatories
- Immunosuppressants
- Biologics

Lifestyle factors



- Stress
- Sleep
- Physical activity

Nutrition strategies



- Support gut health
- Reduce triggers

Supplements



- Iron
- Vitamin B12
- Vitamin D

How To Deal With IBD at Work?

Know your patterns



Track your triggers and recognize early signs of a flare.

Plan your environment

Know where washrooms are and choose seating that feels accessible and comfortable.



Build in flexibility

Take breaks early and adjust your workload during lower-energy periods.



Communicate (to your comfort level)

Share what's necessary and focus on solutions that support your needs at work.



Support your energy

Prioritize meals, hydration, and flexible scheduling for rest or appointments.



Practical Solutions to Navigate the Workplace With IBD



1. Advocate for reasonable accommodations



2. Establish a routine that supports symptom management



3. Use tools (calendar blocking, reminders) to pace your day



4. Build a support system (healthcare team, colleague)