

IBD Digest

Welcome to UPMC's Inflammatory Bowel Disease and Behavioral Health Study!

Since our last newsletter, so much has changed! The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on our day-to-day lives, both in our local communities and globally. This research study has also been affected, though the pandemic hasn't stopped us from moving forward!

In mid-March, we temporarily paused our patient enrollment efforts at all three of our study sites. This was for the safety of our staff, our medical teams, and our participants. Even those of you in our in-person TEAM group likely met with members of our clinical team through a video appointment or over the phone. Your health and safety have been and will always be our priority.

However, there was still a lot going on behind the scenes. We worked closely with stakeholders—including doctors, patients, and peer IBD advocates—to discuss how to adapt to a world where most appointments rapidly switched to telemedicine. We also continued to collect your responses to our follow-up study questionnaires.

After careful consideration and planning on the part of our research team, we started recruiting for the study again in September. Many patients reported wanting to return to in-person visits, particularly with safety measures (like masks) in place. Researchers at all three sites are keeping a close eye on the situation to ensure that everything stays as safe as possible moving forward.

With all of that in mind, we'd like to thank you again for being part of our study and for completing your follow-up questionnaires. Your participation is critical to our work, and we very much appreciate your time!

Meet your social worker!

The UPMC Total Care—IBD Program team includes Emily Weaver, a licensed clinical social worker who works with patients to manage the behavioral health symptoms that frequently accompany IBD.

Let's get to know her. See page 2.

STUDY PROGRESS

As of November 5, 2020,
we have enrolled

160

participants across the
three study locations!

We are 16 percent of the
way to our goal.

REMEMBER!

All participants are asked
to complete a series of
questionnaires at three points:

- Upon enrolling in the study
- Six months after enrolling
- One year after enrolling

You will be paid \$20 each for the
initial and six-month
questionnaires, and \$40 for the
final questionnaire.





Emily Weaver

LSCW: Senior Social Worker, UPMC Total Care—IBD Program

What made you interested in becoming a social worker?

I grew up in a family of nurses and almost went into medicine myself, but after spending a summer working as a camp counselor, I realized the incredible power of talk therapy

as an avenue to help people. That experience set me on a journey to study psychology, and ultimately, social work.

What are some of the ways that you handle stress in your day-to-day life? I am a big believer in rituals, so during quarantine I've started off each day by going for a walk—getting time with my family and nature—and ended the day by sitting on the back porch and reading. With so much uncertainty in the world, having something that is steady and predictable has been very grounding.

What are some of the top stress-relief resources to which you've referred people since the start of COVID-19? During quarantine, many of us are turning more and more to meditation. Some great resources for that are apps like Headspace and Calm, as well as podcasts by some leaders in the field of meditation (such as Tara Brach and Ten Percent Happier). And I can't think of a better book for these times than Pema Chödrön's "When Things Fall Apart."

What's your favorite thing to do in your spare time?

Lately, I've enjoyed finding new places to hike around western PA. I've lived here for almost a decade, and I'm amazed at how many beautiful places I've never visited before!

What's the most rewarding part of your job? Undoubtedly, [it's] bearing witness to the creativity, kindness, resilience, and growth of our patients.

Community resources

If you are looking to connect with your local IBD community, a regional Crohn's and Colitis Foundation (CCF) is a good place to start. The western Pennsylvania/West Virginia chapter has seven different support groups, including ones based in Allison Park, Altoona, Butler, Mt. Lebanon, and Pittsburgh. Looking for support specifically tailored to families? There's a group for that in Wexford.

Several groups have still been connecting through video chats, keeping the supportive community strong. To see the full list, as well organizer contact information, visit www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/find-a-support-group?chapter=536.

Tips for healthy holiday eating



The holiday season is a busy season that can be very exciting. It can also be a time of increased stress for individuals who have specific nutritional needs. Since food is sometimes the center of attention during the holiday season, here are a few tips from Therezia Alchoufete, clinical dietitian specialist in the UPMC Total Care Program, to help you navigate the holidays while avoiding any stress associated with eating.

Instead of meals, enjoy frequent, appetizer-size portions. It's easy to overload your plate with delicious foods, so use a small, appetizer-size plate to help you control portion sizes. This may help you avoid any abdominal cramping or bloating associated with overeating.

BYOD—bring your own dish. If you're looking for something to bring to a party, look no further than your own kitchen. Think about a dish that works well for your gut that others may enjoy. Bring it to share!

Understand any food allergies, intolerances, and sensitivities you may have. If you are unsure, contact your registered dietitian to determine the foods that may cause trouble in your GI tract. Once you know what to avoid, navigating holiday meals will become much easier. Remember, it's OK to say "no thanks" or "I'm OK for now" instead of explaining why you can't eat a certain food.

Avoid arriving hungry. Eating a protein-rich snack before heading out to an event will help curb hunger in case the food is delayed or won't work for you. You can also keep a snack on hand just in case!

Stay hydrated. Remember to check for signs of dehydration and make sure you're drinking water between holiday activities. Drinks such as coffee, soda, tea, and alcohol can eliminate water from your body quickly, so enjoy those options in moderation.

Upcoming events

Looking to get your exercise in and raise money for Crohn's and colitis research—all without leaving home? Consider registering for the Spin4 Crohn's & Colitis Cures House Party on December 5 at noon.



Join on your own or assemble a team of friends and family for a virtual cardio dance and indoor cycling class led by professional instructors. You can learn more at <https://bit.ly/3jiqccb>.

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TIPS

5 stress management strategies that work in 5 minutes (or less)!

Many people have found themselves dealing with more stress and anxiety during quarantine. Instead of falling into the traps of avoiding, judging, or being overwhelmed by our emotions, try using evidence-based strategies to emotionally reset. These strategies are powerful tools. They can help settle our minds so we can effectively manage our problems and protect our bodies from the health impacts of chronic stress. Use these strategies to manage strong emotions. Once you feel calm, you'll be able to manage the problem at hand (or let it go). Here are some strategies to try:

Paired breathing

Breathing can be incredibly powerful when done correctly. Start off by inhaling through your nose for five seconds (if you place a hand on your belly, you should feel it move) and slowly exhaling for five seconds. Some people feel even more relaxed if they take longer to breathe out (you can go all the way up to eight seconds). Repeat your preferred version five times.

Grounding

Worry has the unfortunate effect of taking us out of the moment. When we're worrying, we're focused on the past or future. Why not live in the moment instead? Using your five senses can get you out of your head and back to the present. Follow these steps:

- Name five things you can see.
- Name four things that you can touch.
- Name three things that you can hear.
- Name two things you can smell.
- Name one thing you can taste.

Really pay attention as you go through each sense, and repeat until you feel centered.

Guided imagery

Find your internal "happy place." Close your eyes and imagine yourself slowly descending a staircase to a relaxing place—real or imagined. Once there, feel free to explore, invite in supportive people (or pets), and notice what you can see, hear, smell, and feel in your happy place. Stay there for a few minutes or until you feel relaxed.



Progressive muscle relaxation

The human body cannot be relaxed and tense at the same time. We can actually use tension to relax by intentionally tightening and releasing our muscles. Starting with your feet and moving upward by muscle group. Squeeze your muscles tight for five seconds and inhale. Then relax for 5 five seconds, breathing out. Repeat this step with the next group. As you move through each muscle group, you'll feel the tension leave your body. Try to incorporate all of the following muscle groups: biceps, upper arms, shoulders, head, neck, face, jaw, upper back, chest, lower back, abdomen, hips, buttocks, legs, and feet.

Acknowledge what you can (and can't) control

Attempting to control things outside of our power creates anxiety. Make a list with a column for factors that you have control over (for example, "the way I treat others," "how I take care of my body," or "how I express gratitude") and another column for factors outside of your control (for example, "how others practice social distancing" or "when a vaccine will be available"). Use problem-solving strategies to overcome problems you can control. Use strategies like acceptance, prayer, or seeking support—whatever works best for you—to deal with problems that are outside of your control.



Contact

If you have any questions, please contact a member of the research team at 412-208-5235 or email us at IBDStudy@upmc.edu. We can help you:

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