

LATANJA'S

Guide to Living with Inflammatory
Bowel Disease (IBD)

LESSON #1

Building a Comprehensive Care Team

LaTanja emphasizes the importance of a strong care team. Ideally, your team should include:



Gastroenterologist

Central to care, your gastroenterologist should be knowledgeable, thorough, and collaborative.



Specialists

Specialists include dermatologists, colorectal surgeons, and other relevant professionals.



Primary Care Physician

Primary care physicians manage overall health throughout the process.


Additionally, she says a collaborative approach is essential. Providers should have strong working relationships with each other and be proactive about discussing the latest research and treatment options.



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Building a Comprehensive Care Team



When I had to have surgery, I didn't understand why my doctor was pushing the surgery so much, but **I asked her if she could explain it, and she literally drew a diagram for me on a napkin,** and she broke it down in a language where I could understand, then I knew the seriousness of it. So, it's very important when you are trying to push for a treatment plan that you have doctors who can help you understand, doctors who know about the latest research, and especially about the different types of treatments that are available.”

Key tips on communicating with providers:

- **Open dialogue:** Share concerns with your healthcare team, including hesitations about specific treatments (e.g., steroids).
- **Education and understanding:** Request explanations in accessible language. Visual aids or analogies (e.g., diagrams) can clarify complex medical decisions.
- **Shared decision-making:** Understand that providers should respect your preferences while offering informed guidance.

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LESSON #2

Traveling is Possible With IBD

Catching flights with no fear is achievable with IBD. LaTanja's personal travel hacks include:



Carrying a 'Just in Case Bag'

Always pack a small bag with extra underwear, wipes, and a change of clothes, just in case of an unexpected flare-up.



Embracing the Power of Preparation

Research bathroom locations beforehand and use apps that help you find accessible restrooms on the go.



Communicating Your Needs

Don't be afraid to let your travel companions know about your IBD and any accommodations you might need. Most people are understanding and supportive.

Here are some other things to keep in mind when traveling:

- **Talk to Your Doctor:** Your doctor is your MVP! They can help you assess your health, adjust your medications if needed, and offer personalized advice for managing your IBD while traveling.
- **Food is Your Friend (and Foe):** Be mindful of your diet, especially when trying new foods. Pack some safe snacks and stay hydrated. Don't be afraid to ask about ingredients and preparation methods at restaurants.
- **Listen to Your Body:** Don't push yourself too hard. Rest when you need to, and don't be afraid to adjust your plans if you're feeling unwell.

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Traveling with IBD was something that was challenging for me initially when I was first diagnosed because my symptoms were pretty rough. At some point, I actually kind of became a hermit because I was scared that if I went out, I would have an accident or I would be too sick to drive back home. But again, **I had a long conversation with my doctor. She said, “Go get some Depends (adult diapers) and go get your life back!”** So that is my broad advice to those that have IBD: **do not let this disease stop you from living your best life.”**

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LESSON #3

Support Systems Are Everything



Living with IBD can feel like a rollercoaster. Some days you're up, some days you're down, and sometimes you just need someone to understand what you're going through. Here's who LaTanja trusted to be part of her support squad:

- **Healthcare Heroes:** Your doctor, nurses, and other healthcare providers are your frontline support. They provide medical expertise, answer your questions, and help you navigate the challenges of IBD.
- **Online Communities:** Connect with others who get it through online support groups and forums. Sharing experiences, tips, and encouragement can be incredibly empowering. Check out the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation or the NOWINCLUDED community.
- **Family and Friends:** Lean on your loved ones for emotional support, even if they don't fully understand IBD. Open communication and honest conversations can help them learn and be there for you in the ways you need.
- **Therapists and Counselors:** Don't underestimate the power of mental health support. A therapist can help you navigate the emotional challenges of IBD and develop coping strategies.

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For me, it was very difficult for my family to understand what I was going through. They were as supportive as they could be, and I never held that against them, only because I didn't really understand what I was going through myself. So I knew it was difficult for me to relay that to them, and we were kind of learning all together, but having a strong health support team was really what kind of helped carry me through a good portion of it.”

Why support matters:



Reduces Isolation

Hearing from others who have successfully managed their IBD can inspire hope and motivation.

Offers Practical Advice

Learning from others' experiences, discovering helpful tips, and gaining new perspectives can help manage your IBD.



Boosts Emotional Well-being

Sharing your struggles and receiving support can help you cope with the emotional challenges of IBD

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After her mother's passing, LaTanja faced a new battle: **Crohn's disease, a type of IBD.** Misdiagnosed and misunderstood, she endured years of pain and uncertainty. But her story is one of resilience and hope.

With this playbook, you too, can conquer IBD.



Join **NOWINCLUDED'S** Gut Health circle to connect with others like Latanja!

