

# Blackboards and Bathrooms

A comprehensive resource to help teachers  
support the education of children living  
with inflammatory bowel disease



# Blackboards and Bathrooms has been created especially for you – the educator.

**Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)** is an umbrella term for two disorders: Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. IBD causes inflammation (redness and swelling) and ulceration (sores) in the digestive tract. Those living with the disease frequently experience the urgent, unexpected need to have a bowel movement and often require immediate access to a bathroom. The disease is unpredictable, embarrassing, debilitation and stressful. Students with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) may need additional support.

The Canadian Digestive Health Foundation (CDHF) has created **Blackboards and Bathrooms** to provide educators with the resources they need to support students living with IBD. Our goals are to help minimize the burden of teaching students with IBD and minimizes the negative impact this disease has on a student's academic performance and school experiences.

## This guide will help you understand:

- the impact fluctuating symptoms of IBD can have on your student
- how the disease can impact health, behaviour, and academic performance
- strategies you can employ to minimize the impact the disease has on the student's academic performance
- accommodations that may allow students with IBD to have a more positive school experience

Blackboards & Bathrooms provides practical strategies and tools to help students with IBD thrive in your classroom. As a teacher, you have a special opportunity to enrich the lives of students living with IBD. We're hoping this guide will ease the way for you and your students.

**Blackboards & Bathrooms** provides **practical strategies** and tools to help **students with IBD thrive** in your classroom.





# The Impact of Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Inflammatory bowel disease is chronic but inconsistent. Symptoms can vary dramatically from wellness one week to illness the next. Students with IBD may have flares (when symptoms get worse) that occur unexpectedly and with alternating periods of remission (when they are well). Your student may not appear ill even when the disease is active.

Frequent diarrhea can lead to weight loss, poor growth, dehydration, malnutrition, and anemia. And, medications for IBD can affect mental function and mood in highly variable ways. IBD symptoms, clinic appointments and tests may also interfere with punctuality, attendance and engagement at school. If students don't have the opportunity to catch up, they may become frustrated and lose interest during learning activities and risk falling behind.

All of these factors may lead to day-to-day fluctuations in energy, concentration, participation, and achievement. While every day is different for people with the disease, we have tried to summarize some common issues to help you understand what these children live with.



## **Students with IBD may suffer from:**

- frequent diarrhea/ bloody diarrhea
- abdominal pain, cramping and urgency
- nausea and vomiting, decreased appetite
- weight loss and anemia
- malnutrition, fatigue
- poor growth, pubertal delay
- joint pain, joint stiffness
- skin afflictions

## **Students with IBD often miss out on school experiences because:**

- they may be unable to participate fully in activities requiring strength or stamina, such as physical education or extracurricular sports
- medications can have side effects that impair concentration and well-being
- they require regular clinic visits and may require hospitalization for surgery and other health care related reasons
- their overall wellness is hindered by the disease

## **When attending school, students may struggle with:**






- fatigue and reduced energy levels
- impaired focus
- impaired mood
- social discomfort or inhibition, emotional withdrawal, depression

If students don't have the opportunity to **catch up** they risk falling behind.



# What you need to know about IBD

Helping Students with Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)

Issue	What you need to know
<b>Attendance</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students with inflammatory bowel disease may require multiple absences from school</li> <li>Response to treatment is variable; a child may stop responding to one treatment and require a change of medication</li> <li>You may need to provide resources, tutoring, note-taking assistance, rest periods, extensions, and make-up exams</li> </ul>
<b>Classroom experience</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Urgent need to go to the bathroom and accidents from incontinence are the most stressful classroom situations for students with inflammatory bowel disease</li> <li>Full and easy access to bathrooms should be arranged</li> <li>Post-surgical care may require temporary absence from the classroom. When planning coursework, consider that IBD-related pain and fatigue can impair performance</li> <li>Children with inflammatory bowel disease may absorb nutrients poorly. As a result, supplemental nutrition may be needed</li> </ul>
<b>Physical activity</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage exercise when the student is feeling up to it</li> <li>Allow rest periods for fatigue when they are not</li> <li>Physical activity may stimulate bowel urgency; allow the student to leave the activity and go to the bathroom at any point</li> <li>IBD or its treatment may raise the risk of joint pain and fractures</li> </ul>
<b>Mental health</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expect behavioural changes in students with inflammatory bowel disease</li> <li>Because the student never knows when the next flare will strike, the fear of needing to rush to the bathroom or fear of having an embarrassing "accident" causes significant distress so they may have trouble relaxing and focusing on school tasks.</li> <li>Students are at increased risk of depression and anxiety. Depression may manifest as irritability, low tolerance, frustration, and complaints of aches and pains</li> <li>inflammatory bowel disease and its treatment may lead to withdrawal, denial, depression and anxiety; if you have any concerns, discuss them with staff and caregivers</li> <li>Bodily changes caused by inflammatory bowel disease and its treatment (e.g., weight gain, acne, delayed growth, ostomies) may impact self-esteem</li> </ul>
<b>Medications</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Medication side effects may impair academic and social performance and may prompt students to stop taking the medication</li> <li>If you suspect side effects, or you think a student has stopped taking his or her medication, report it to parents</li> <li>Some inflammatory bowel disease medications can impair children's resistance to infection; let caregivers know about any infectious disease outbreaks in school</li> </ul>

Adapted from: Kitto L. Inflammatory bowel disease: school nurse management. JOSN 2010;26:102-114.

*Note: Please copy and distribute this page to school staff and/or post in the staff room.*

## Privacy in the school and classroom

Certain people at school will need to know your student has inflammatory bowel disease. You, the principal, and resource teacher will be part of an inner circle. Staff members should also be made aware of the student's need to immediately access to the bathroom. The student should always carry the CDHF IBD All Access Pass with them.

Decisions about whether to disclose the illness to schoolmates are best left to the student. Some students are eager to share information about their illness while others prefer complete privacy, and still others fall somewhere in between these two extremes.

## Helping classmates understand

To help build a better understanding about inflammatory bowel disease and better relate to the IBD student, you can share some basics with your class. First, be sure to ask your IBD student for permission, to be sure they are comfortable with your doing so.

Here are some helpful facts:

- inflammatory bowel disease is not contagious so there's no risk of catching it
- Students with IBD may need to go to the bathroom often and urgently
- The disease tends to flare up and quiet down so children may feel well one day and terrible the next
- Students with IBD may sometimes find it hard to eat
- Students with IBD may be on a special liquid diet where they are unable to eat normal food for up to 8 to 12 weeks. They may also have a tube inserted through their nose into their stomach to deliver a special liquid diet
- Students with IBD may have to miss school, sometimes for long periods of time
- Medications used to treat IBD can make the student look puffy, trigger or worsen acne, and cause mood swings

### Communication

Collaborate with the student, caregivers, staff and other health professionals to **maximize the student's school experience**



## Returning to School After a Flare

While school can sometimes be a challenge, especially during flares, going to school helps the child with inflammatory bowel disease regain a sense of normalcy and provides a lifeline of hope for the future. The child's physician or parent should provide the school with a summary of what to expect.

Depending on the student's academic performance before and during the absence, the resource teacher may recommend setting up an IEP meeting that includes faculty, administrators, special education personnel, and parents.

# Blackboards and Bathrooms was developed for You

**Blackboards and Bathrooms** was developed by the Canadian Digestive Health Foundation in cooperation with Robbie's Rainbow.



## About the Canadian Digestive Health Foundation

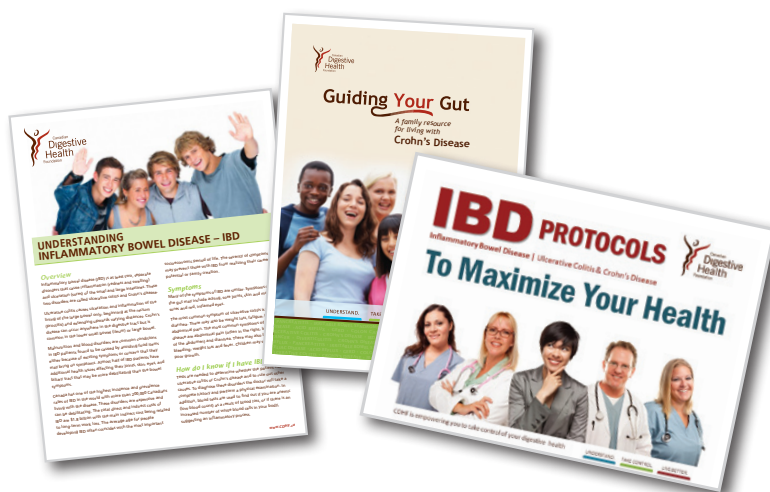
The Canadian Digestive Health Foundation (CDHF) provides expert advice and compassionate support to the millions of Canadians suffering from digestive disorders. We help patients living with IBD and other gastrointestinal illnesses recognize symptoms, understand treatments options, communicate with their health teams, and find effective ways to successfully manage their disease so they can enjoy living live with confidence and optimism.

To learn more, visit [www.CDHF.ca/IBD](http://www.CDHF.ca/IBD)

## About Robbie's Rainbow

Robbie's Rainbow is a children's charity which provides children with rapid access to critical treatments not covered by many private and public health plans, educational resources and a parent support network. It is dedicated to improving the health and quality of life of children living with IBD in Canada.

To learn more, visit [www.RobbiesRainbow.ca](http://www.RobbiesRainbow.ca)



## Gi BodyGuard

Use Gi BodyGuard, the CDHF's FREE tracking app iPhone and Android, to help you quickly, easily and privately track and share information like bowel patterns, digestive symptoms, medications, food, exercise and more with your physician. [www.CDHF.ca/BiBodyGuard](http://www.CDHF.ca/BiBodyGuard)

## Education Resources

The CDHF has developed a complete library of education resources to help you understand digestive health and disease. Become empowered to take control of your digestive health with our guides, videos, seminars and more. [www.CDHF.ca](http://www.CDHF.ca)

**Blackboards and Bathrooms** was made possible through an unrestricted educational grant from AbbVie.

