



Helping your friends and family understand the impact of your chronic condition

If you have a chronic condition, you're not alone. Nearly half of all Australians live with a chronic condition¹

Just as your chronic condition impacts you, it may also impact those around you, like your friends and family, in different ways. Relevant and accurate information about your condition and how it affects your life can help those around you better understand how it will impact them. It can put them in a position where they can provide you with the support you need.



Why is it important to help the people around you understand your condition?

The notion of a “chronic condition” may be unfamiliar to some people. They may not understand that some chronic conditions can be invisible or that they can flare up at times, and that chronic conditions require ongoing medical attention and may limit daily activities.

If the people around you are familiar with your condition and how it affects you:

- They can better understand what you can and can't do, and why.
- It will help them understand how best to help and support you.



Why can talking about your condition be helpful?

It's up to you who you tell about your condition, but here are some considerations:



For your safety

If you have a condition where you can suddenly become ill, the people you spend a lot of time with should know what to do in an emergency.



For their support

The people who you are close to are interested in what's going on in your life. Opening up and talking to them about how you feel, knowing you have their understanding and support, can also make you feel better.



For your relationship

Telling people about how your condition affects you can help them understand why you may not always be available to socialise, help out, or even answer calls or respond to messages. This can help prevent people making the assumption you don't want to spend time with them.

Deciding what to say about your condition

You can tell people as much or as little about your condition as you want. Here are some things you may want to think about:

- **How much do they already know about my condition?**

It can be helpful to suggest those close to you do some research to accurately understand your condition. Reputable websites, including websites of patient organisations, can be a good resource.

- **How does the condition affect me personally?**

People can experience the same condition differently from others. It can be helpful to explain the personal symptoms and experiences you have in day-to-day life.

- **What role can they play in helping me manage my condition?**

You may want to tell people about the things you need to do or avoid to best manage your condition and prevent flare-ups. For example, avoiding certain types of food or hot weather.

- **How can they help?**

You may want to let people know the sort of things you could use their help with. For example, shopping, help with doctor's appointments, or even just being there to listen.



Dealing with misconceptions around chronic conditions

Some people may hold misconceptions around chronic conditions; here are some strategies and suggestions that can help.

Are you getting better?

I know you really want me to be well, but my doctors and I don't know the answer to that at the moment

Acknowledge

It's important to acknowledge that many of these statements are made from a kind place – your loved one wants to help, wants to spend time with you, or hopes for you to be healthy.

I really enjoy our tennis games but I'm just not up to it now. Maybe we could enjoy a movie together instead?

When can you play tennis with us again?

Correct

There is a lot of misinformation around chronic illness. It's not always easy to tell the good from the bad. Chronic conditions can be unpredictable and you might not know when you'll have a bad day.

You look great, how can you be unwell?

I wish it worked like that! With my condition, people can't always tell when I'm having symptoms or feeling bad

Redirect

Provide them with accurate information about your condition. You may direct them to a reputable website, or provide them with reassurance you and your healthcare team are working together to manage your condition in a way that is best for you.

And remember – nobody is positive all the time. Everyone has their good and bad days. You're allowed to have them too.

People with my condition have pretty different experiences. There's a website that explains it really well...

I've heard people with your condition can't eat that?

Reference: 1. Australian Government Institute of Health and Welfare. Chronic conditions and multimorbidity. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/chronic-conditions-and-multimorbidity>. Accessed November 2023.

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