

TALKING TO LOVED ONES ABOUT YOUR RHEUMATIC ILLNESS



For those living with rheumatic conditions, or any chronic illness, it can be hard speaking to others about how rheumatic disease impacts our everyday lives and activities. Many fear being judged or viewed differently.



It can get **isolating** to handle things on your own, this is where learning to openly communicate with those close to you can build a strong **support system**.

1 The First Conversation: telling someone new about your illness

It is not easy **initiating** the first conversation about health with someone close to you. Whether you have been diagnosed for years, or have only recently been diagnosed, there are different things you can do to make that first conversation **easier**.

- Give a **general explanation** of your illness and the main ways it impacts you. Clearly explaining the conditions and symptoms can make it easier for the other person to understand. For example, if you have difficulty walking due to knee pain, **express** that limitation and **explain why** you experience the pain.
- **Explain why** you are telling them. Perhaps you want someone to talk to about it, or you want to make them aware about certain challenges you face when it comes to doing activities. This can help when you need **extra support**.



2 Keeping up the conversation

While physical symptoms are easy to list, the effect of chronic illness on one's **mental health** can be a different form of challenge. There are ways to maintain **open dialogue** about your condition, which can help with overall communication.

- **Be honest** about your emotions and tell people when a particular day is bad for you. Give them the **chance to listen** to your experiences as it can help them **empathize and offer support**.
- **Answer questions** but be aware of if it's the right moment to **discuss** these matters. To avoid uncomfortable situations, make sure to **plan ahead** and create a **safe space** for both of you.
- Know that you don't always have to justify your feelings: **it's ok** to struggle more on some days without any particular reason. Not knowing the "why" doesn't make your **feelings** any less valid.



There will always be people who **struggle to understand** your experience and may act or speak in hurtful ways simply out of a lack of **awareness**. Self-advocacy is when you speak up about how your experiences affect you with the hope that others will **understand**. Practising **self-advocacy** is important and you should never feel guilty for speaking up. Remember that you do not owe people your time and energy; there is nothing wrong with distancing yourself (when possible) from those who don't seem willing to listen. The ones who care will meet you half-way and **put in the effort** to learn.