

New diagnosis: Helping your child cope



By Preet Bhogal

When your child is diagnosed with a medical condition, emotions are running high. You leave the doctor's feeling overwhelmed. You are faced with a deluge of medications, doctors' appointments and questions—that you need answered. You are not alone, nor are you the first to live with this challenge. Here are some general tips that can help make life easier.

Tips...

for medical appointments

- Schedule the appointment for a time when your child will be alert and well-fed.
- Bring your own toys to keep your child entertained.
- Share with your child the details about the appointment and its benefits to his or her overall health and condition.
- Don't promise something that might not be true. For example, don't tell your child that a test or treatment won't hurt. Rather, say you'll be nearby if he or she needs you.
- Talk about the good things that will happen after the appointment, such as going home or getting a special treat.

Source: *Today's Kids in Motion*

Educate yourself

Managing a skin condition is all about knowledge. Learn the name of the condition and understand the diagnosis. Write down all the questions you wish to ask each member of your child's medical team.

A new routine?

Find out how the condition is going to affect your child's sense of self and daily activities. Managing the disease will disrupt your family's usual routine, so take the time to mentally prepare yourself for the upcoming changes.

Start with the practicalities. How will you get from home to medical appointments? What medications will your child require? Are the recommended treatments or medications covered by your province or private medical plan? Do you have to inform the school about your child's new condition and involve teachers with the treatment plan? Will you need to take time off from work? Nailing down the basics is key to ensuring the inevitable disruption is minimal.

Who else can help?

Along with asking questions of the medical professionals involved in your child's care, consider investigating other available resources such as other parents in similar circumstances. They can be an invaluable source of advice on treatments and quick tips, and can provide emotional support.

Find out if there is a patient organization in your area. If none exists, look online. If you can't find a local support group, start one! Contact us—we can help.

Speaking with your child about the diagnosis

Telling children about their condition can be less traumatic if you are armed with information. It is also important to include children in their treatment plan. Provide them with learning opportunities and ensure they feel like active participants in this journey. Everyone is learning together.

Although the bulk of your energy will understandably be focused on your newly diagnosed child, don't neglect yourself and the rest of the family. Priorities will shift, but remember to take care of your own health. In addition, ensure you seek professional help if you or your child requires counselling.

Incorporating some of this advice into your journey with your child will make living with a newly diagnosed condition less difficult. It might even be rewarding.

Preet Bhogal is a writer and a member of the Board of Directors of the CSPA, through which he helps educate people on the impact of skin disease.