

THE EFFECTS OF A DIAGNOSIS ON FAMILY AND LOVED ONES

Effect on Family and Friends:

A diagnosis affects the patient's entire family. One of the first questions that comes to mind, after you have absorbed the news yourself is, "Who should I tell?" Most people have found that the best choice is to share the diagnosis with those closest to them, and give them the opportunity to offer support.

It will be your personal decision as to when this should be done.

Spouses:

Your spouse may be frightened by your diagnosis, and may feel many of the same emotions as you feel - helplessness, anxiety, and sadness. Some spouses may go into denial and may not wish to discuss the illness immediately. If you have problems talking about your illness with your spouse, you may wish to consult a professional counsellor.

Ideally, your spouse should be a participant in discussions with your doctors regarding your treatment and any progression of your illness. Knowledge of the facts and the feeling that he or she is part of the process can lessen anxiety.

Your spouse will also need to know how he or she will be involved in your care and what decisions will have to be made.

Adult Children:

Even as an adult, a child may find it difficult to cope with a parent's illness. The dynamics of the parent-child relationship may become reversed as the children gradually become supporters both emotionally and financially. Adult children with their own families, and careers may feel guilty about not spending much time with you, or may live in other parts of the country where frequent visits are not possible.

Your children may also be afraid of expressing feelings of anger or resentment over your diagnosis, and might want reassurance that their feelings are acceptable. It will also be important for them to know what role they will play in any decisions regarding your care or finances.

Parents:

If you have elderly parents living with you, and they have been relying on you for support and help as they age, your diagnosis may disrupt their life also. While you are undergoing treatment, it may become necessary to shift your care-giving responsibilities to other family members or to health care professionals.

Friends:

Friends can be a great source of support when you are ill. While some friends may find it difficult to discuss your disease, you may discover hidden strengths in the least likely of companions. Many times friends are waiting for a clue from you as to what behaviour is appropriate. For instance, they may call to check on you and say, "Let me know if there is anything I can do to help". Most people are grateful, if there is something specific they can do to show their friendship. When they offer assistance look at the offer positively. For example, allow them to run a specific errand, or complete a household job like gardening. Some days it might be pleasant just to have their company.

Be open and honest in your communications, and you will both benefit.

You do not have to be alone in the illness. Allow family and friends to support, care and grieve with you.

This information is designed to assist victims and their families, but by no means should be relied on as medical advice. Victims of asbestos related diseases should consult their doctors for medical advice and also to ensure the 'above' is applicable in their specific circumstances.