You’ve been sent this infosheet because you have an employee with Crohn’s Disease. This information will help you understand their condition and how you can offer them the best possible support in the workplace.
WHAT IS CROHN’S DISEASE (CD)?
An autoimmune inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) that predominantly causes symptoms of abdominal pain, diarrhoea, loss of appetite and weight loss.\(^1\) It is not Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).\(^2\) CD may also cause complications such as skin rashes, arthritis, inflammation of the eye, tiredness, and lack of concentration. Symptom frequency and severity varies, and many symptoms may come and go unexpectedly.\(^1\)

WHAT CAUSES CD?
A combination of environmental factors and genetic predispositions lead to the body’s immune system reacting abnormally, causing inflammation in the gastrointestinal tract and symptoms of CD.\(^2\)

CAN CD BE CURED?
There is no known pharmaceutical or surgical cure for CD. People with CD will have it for life.\(^2\) Treatment options are restricted to controlling symptoms, and reducing flare-ups (worsening of symptoms).\(^1\) Relief of symptoms, as well as remission of the disease (a noticeable and prolonged lessening of intensity or degree of symptoms) can be achieved in most patients using medications and/or surgery.\(^2\)

DOES CD AFFECT AN EMPLOYEE’S ABILITY TO DO THEIR JOB?\(^3\)
Although CD may flare up, people with good symptom control should be able to work productively when they receive supportive and flexible management. When they do experience a flare, they may become tired and need special accommodations until their symptoms are under control again. Every flare is different, so some people with CD may need time off, or have to work from home.

HOW CAN EMPLOYERS PROVIDE A SUPPORTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH CD?\(^3\)
Employers can support employees with CD by being flexible with their working arrangements, encouraging a knowledgeable and supportive work environment, and being understanding about time off that may be needed for doctors’ appointments. Working from home when possible is also a great help, especially during a flare.

Many people with CD find their bowel movements difficult to discuss, especially when explaining any needs they may have to urgently and frequently go to the toilet. Access to separate facilities or to a disabled toilet may be an option. Handling any conversations regarding their disease with sensitivity and confidentiality is key. Each person is unique and needs may differ from one person to another. It is important to respect the individual’s wishes, for example with regards to privacy or general disclosure.

IS CD COVERED BY THE EQUALITY ACT 2010?
People with CD may qualify for protection from discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.
Please visit this website for information and guidance on the Equality Act: https://www.gov.uk/equality-act-2010-guidance

Other useful websites:
Directgov—informative UK government website covering a range of issues including all aspects of employment and disability: http://www.gov.uk

Employers’ Forum on Disability provides a framework for employers for developing best practice in the employment of disabled people: http://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/

Informmation is UK specific. Local markets to update.

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