

Telling a new partner

Telling a new partner - key points

- Some people prefer to tell new partners about their bleeding disorder early in the relationship, while others prefer to wait until it starts getting serious
- Make sure you understand your diagnosis and have some information about your bleeding disorder so that you can discuss it with your partner and answer their questions
- If you have bleeding symptoms, it can be helpful to tell your partner before you have sex so they understand what is happening if there is bleeding
- Leaving it too long in the relationship to tell your partner about your bleeding disorder may cause resentment or mistrust
- If you might have children together in the future, you will need to be prepared for questions about how the gene is passed on and what impact it might have on the child
- Putting off telling your partner may not change how they respond – but it may make you worry for longer
- Speak with your Haemophilia Treatment Centre (HTC) if you would like support in telling your partner.



New intimate relationships can be an exciting time as you get to know one another and grow closer. But knowing if, when and how to tell a new partner about various aspects of your life can be difficult. This includes telling a new partner about having a bleeding disorder or carrying the gene.

Why might you want to tell a new partner? For some women having bleeding symptoms can affect sexual

activity. There may be bleeding during sex, or you may have heavy or prolonged periods, or want to explain how your treatment impacts on your body. You may want to talk about it in the context of having children together. It may also be important knowledge for them to have so that they know what to do in case of an emergency.



“ I’ve always been really open about my bleeding disorder. I explained it, and what it means for my life. It did kind of ruin the mood at the time however! ”

“ I have a port [surgically implanted device for infusing treatment product] on my side and it can be felt often. ”

“ I had a gum bleed midway through our first sexual encounter and he, understandably, freaked out and thought I was dying! ”

“ Telling a partner doesn’t always translate to them understanding. As with most things it’s not until you experience something that you really get it. I’ve had times when there’s the shock of seeing blood during sex and I remind them I have a bleeding disorder. That’s when they realise what it can mean. Open communication is so important in times like this. It’s an experience to see their coping skills, adaptability and grace under fire. ”

“ I don’t have normal periods, I have mid-cycle bleeds and erratic bleeding. So it’s not like I can easily plan for sex on a non-bleed day. And a new partner needs to be OK with experiencing blood and sex - for me having a bleeding disorder means sometimes these aren’t separate. ”



Most people within the general community don't have a lot of knowledge or experience of bleeding disorders, so your partner's initial reaction will probably be influenced by the information you give them and how you talk about it. You will need to explain what it means to have a bleeding disorder or carry the gene. Generally, people don't need loads of information the first time this comes up, but they may have questions for you or need some time to think about it. You don't need to be an expert in bleeding disorders, but it is useful if you're able to give your partner brief answers to their questions, or be honest if you're not sure.

“ Shame makes these conversations harder. We’re so used to hiding away the facts of our periods. Be calm and confident. Know in advance why you want to tell them and what you expect from them once they know. ”

If there is a possibility of having children together you will need to have this discussion at some stage, but you may wonder *when is the best time?* And *what will it mean for the relationship?*

This will include giving them information about the possibilities and options if you decide to start a family. They may want to know about some of the following:

- How does having a bleeding disorder or carrying the gene affect you?
- What are the chances of having a child with a bleeding disorder?
- How would having a bleeding disorder affect the child?
- How does a bleeding disorder impact on parents, and other children in the family?
- Are there options for reducing the chances of having a child with a bleeding disorder?

Make sure you are up to date with medical advances in the prevention and treatment of bleeding episodes, particularly if you carry the gene for haemophilia and don't have symptoms. Women who don't need treatment themselves can make the mistake of basing their information on how things were for their father, brother or other affected relative. Management of bleeding disorders has improved radically in recent years and continues to improve. The prospects for someone born with a bleeding disorder today are very different to those of someone born even a generation before.

Providing current information calmly will help your partner form their own responses. Try to stick to the facts rather than letting your fears and worries drive the discussion.



“I shared my status as a carrier with my partner pretty early on and am fortunate that he has never seemed worried or phased by it. I think he saw what a full and active life my Dad has and that has provided a great example, although he is also aware of the challenges it has posed for Dad.”

Concern about your partner's reaction can be a barrier to starting a conversation. Is it better to tell them 'up front', or do you wait until the relationship is on more solid ground? There is no magic answer to this question – it's an individual decision. You may prefer to tell a new partner early on. If they can't accept the news, in spite of your best efforts at explaining, it may contribute to you deciding not to pursue the relationship. It may feel easier to



let the relationship go before you both get more attached. Or you may decide to wait to tell until the relationship looks likely to continue. Leaving it too long into the relationship can cause resentment or mistrust, especially if you have already shared a lot about yourselves and your plans for the future.

Some women have found that one way of bringing it up earlier is as a discussion about preparing for an emergency, if you were going to be in each other's company for a while. If you have one, you could show them your ABDR card and explain what they would need to do.

Talking to your partner is the best way to find out what their views are on the possibility of having a child with a bleeding disorder. Some partners will accept the possibility, while others will have more negative reactions, which may not change, even with more information. Having different views about this or about family planning options can put a lot of stress on the relationship. Knowing your partner's views early on can help both of you make important decisions about the future of the relationship.

“Have an honest conversation, as it's not going to get any easier, because once you're pregnant, it could be too late. It will also add stress on the relationship if you didn't disclose it beforehand.”

All relationships have their challenges. Sometimes those challenges test the strength of the partnership. Putting off telling your partner probably won't change how they respond – but it may make you worry for longer.

“I was always scared when telling potential partners because of all things in the world the best I can offer is 50/50.”

“Remember you don't have to tell anyone you don't want to. It is your body, your condition and your right to tell people when you feel you are ready. However, opening up early, if it is going to be an ongoing relationship, does help navigate any uncomfortable or embarrassing situations.”

Make sure you understand your diagnosis before you tell a new partner so you will be better prepared for any questions and able to talk calmly. Choose an appropriate time and place to tell them and prepare in advance. See **Tips for telling others**, on page 2 of this resource. If you need help in preparing to tell your partner you can speak to a Haemophilia Treatment Centre counsellor, psychologist or social worker.

Once you've told them, your partner may feel like they have a lot to think about, particularly if having children is a possibility. It's a good idea to have current written information you can leave with them. Your partner might like to speak with members of the Haemophilia Treatment Centre team, or to a partner of someone else who carries the gene. This can usually be arranged by staff at the Haemophilia Treatment Centre.

“You need to be educated about the condition so you can educate. If you can explain it's less scary. There's a lot of stigma associated with it, a lot of people don't understand how much treatment has changed.”

“I told my partner early on but it wasn't a planned conversation. It was in the context of discussing my brothers' haemophilia so the conversation then switched to me.”