



Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Q Why do people join a Support Group

A Research has found that the top five reasons people join a group are to:

- know they aren't alone
- hear about current medical research
- become more informed about their condition, treatment and side effects
- learn how other people deal with it and compare their experiences
- relax with others who understand what they are going through.

Q What are the benefits I can expect from being a member of an Alpha-1 Canada On-line Support Group?

A Research indicates that attending Support Groups can be beneficial and that patients who participate in Support Groups — in addition to their medical treatments — report less anxiety and depression and actually live longer than those who do not attend. It is speculated that having the social support of others in the Group boosts the immune system by reducing anxiety and psychological stress.

You can also expect

- instant identity by interacting with others “who know how you feel”
- improvements in feelings of loneliness through a unique empathy from other Members which differs from that of professionals
- increased empowerment by encouraging you to take charge of your condition and a feeling of strength in numbers
- a feeling of safety in being able to ask questions in a safe, non-judgmental place about activities of daily living helping to redirect emotions and creating a level of accountability for your own health
- increased self-esteem and equality among Members, which has therapeutic benefits
- social role models develop and you will learn how others cope
- opportunities for mentoring
- a normalizing effect occurs where you begin to view your experiences as “normal,” understand that you are not alone and feel less isolated, depressed and stigmatized
- networking with others creates caring relationships, fosters roles other than “patient” and provides immediate access to help outside of meeting times

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- information sharing provides practical approaches to lifestyle issues and the sharing of personal experiences to the benefit of all members.

You should not expect to receive medical advice. Any information you hear in the Group pertaining to your health should be reviewed with your physician. Nothing provided by the Support Group Leader or other Group Members should be construed as a substitute for professional advice or treatment by a health care professional.

Q When and how often will the Support Group meet?

A These are decisions that each group will make for itself. It would be safe to assume that groups will meet once or twice per month for between 1 and 1½ hours each time in the early evening. However, something completely different may work for some groups. If you are a member of the group when it forms, rest assured that you will be involved in making these decisions.

Q Will I need any special computer equipment to take part?

A The short answer is yes, you will need a computer, a high speed internet connection (cable or DSL, although other options are coming on the market as well), a webcam and a headset with at least one earphone and a microphone. If you do not already have a webcam and headset you should be able to buy them for about \$20 each.

The long answer is:

1. A high speed internet connection (not dial-up) ideally 4 Mbps (megabytes per second) down and 512 kbps (kilobytes per second) up, and at least 512 kbps down and 128 kbps up. There are many free speed tests available on the internet. These two will tell you how fast your connection really is and are two of the ones that won't try to sell you anything: <http://speedtest.net/> and <http://www.bandwidthplace.com/>

If you use a wireless network for your internet you can increase the speed and quality of you connection by using an Ethernet cable instead. Plug one end into the Ethernet port on your computer and the other directly into one of the LAN ports on your router.

2. A computer with a Core 2 Duo 1.8 GHz (gigahertz) processor is ideal. A computer with a 1 GHz processor is fine.
3. A webcam and headset. The more money you spend on a webcam the more data you will be uploading to other members of your group and the slower everyone's connection will become. If you spend \$20 each on a webcam and headset the quality of your video and audio will be good enough. If you already have a webcam and headset, use them. The biggest reason for using a headset is so that you can hear other members well and they hear you better. If you have a built-in microphone and speakers on your computer and use them the whole meeting will sound to you like its taking place in a big empty room and that's how you will sound to everyone else.

Q Will my confidentiality be assured?

A In order for a Support Group to grow and thrive confidentiality is the most important issue the Group will have to deal with. Leaders and Members are expected not discuss with other persons (such as family, friends, neighbours, etc.) any information obtained in conversation with the Group and/or its Members.

All members will be required to read, understand, sign and return a confidentiality agreement before they participate in Group meetings.

Confidentiality extends not only for the duration of the time any person is in the Group, but also continues indefinitely once their membership with the Group has ended. Research has found that the top five reasons people join a group are to:

- know they aren't alone
- hear about current medical research
- become more informed about their condition, treatment and side effects
- learn how other people deal with it and compare their experiences
- relax with others who understand what they are going through.

During your membership in an Alpha-1 Canada Support Group you may learn personal and confidential information about individuals involved with the Group. Whether information is available to you through the Group or accidentally, you must agree to maintain confidentiality and not reveal information to any person in the Group or outside the Group while a Member of the Group or at any time in the future when you may no longer be a Member of the Group.

Breaking of the confidentiality agreement could result in the termination of your membership with the Alpha-1 Canada Support Group.

Although good faith efforts are taken to preserve participant confidentiality, Alpha-1 Canada can make no guarantees in this regard nor to information communicated by and between participants in the Group.

Your Group Leader will do everything in his or her power to maintain your confidentiality and will ask you to do the same.

Q What are my responsibilities as a Group Member?

A As a Group Member your responsibilities are to:

- help other Members feel comfortable
- be sure the speaker has finished describing his/her problem before responding
- listen attentively when another Member is speaking and avoid side conversations
- promote positive comments and new viewpoints

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- participate in the discussion - sharing your problems and offering ideas
- rather than engage in advice giving, assist other Members in solving their own problems
- assure fellow Members that whatever is said in the Group stays in the Group
- make a commitment to the Group, contributing whatever talents, skills, resources or information you can
- remember that the group Leader is a volunteer, he or she spends a great deal of his or her own time preparing for the meetings, conducting the meetings and following-up on questions Members may ask; if you have the ability to help the leader out with some of these tasks, by all means offer your assistance.

For further information consult our website at www.alpha1canada.ca

or contact Alpha-1 Canada at:

1-888-669-4583

or

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