

Writing a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor, like the other media outreach tools included in this tool kit, educate readers on an issue, affect public opinion and influence public officials' positions and decisions. They also alert the editorial boards of newspapers that an issue is relevant to their readership, and therefore it merits coverage. Similarly, a campaign of letters to the editor (letters sent from multiple sources addressing a single issue) can add energy and urgency to the call for increased attention to different health issues. A sample letter to the editor is provided in this tool kit.

1. **Make it timely.** Letters to the editor are usually a response or a reaction to an article that appeared in that specific newspaper. They should be submitted within seven days from when the article appeared in the paper.
2. **Cite references.** Reference the article in your letter, and include the headline and date in the first or second sentence of your letter.
3. **Keep it short.** Check with your newspaper's editorial department on the word limits. Most are between 100–250 words but guidelines can vary greatly. Newspapers often take the liberty of editing letters they receive. Keep your letter concise to ensure that your important points won't be cut.
4. **Make one point.** Make your well thought out point in 100–250 words.
5. **Start strong.** Grab the reader's and editor's attention with a passionate opening sentence.
6. **Substantiate.** Support your position with succinct facts. Provide the complete reference for these facts as an addendum.
7. **Personalize.** Write about your own experience or how the issue affects people directly. Explain why YOU care about the issue and why the readers and editor should care.
8. **Make it local.** How does this issue affect the community?
9. **Use your title.** If you are in a leadership position locally with UMDf or another health-related organization, consider signing the letter with that title. Providing your title and the name of your workplace or institution can sometimes help to get a letter printed. Larger papers may wish to confirm that you are indeed the signatory.
10. **Submit it electronically.** Most newspapers prefer e-mail submissions or faxes of letters to the editor. Check the paper's Web site or call to confirm the preferred method of submission.
11. **Include your complete contact information.** Complete means name, day and evening phone numbers, cell phone number, fax number and e-mail address. Reporters must be able to reach you after 5:00 p.m.

Sample Letter to the Editor

TIPS

- Make your letter relevant to a recently published article in this newspaper.
- Include real life examples with real people from the local community/area.
- Utilize and emphasize your key messages.

(Approx. 300 words)

[DATE]

[NAME OF EDITOR]

[NAME OF NEWSPAPER]

[ADDRESS OF NEWSPAPER]

To the Editor:

In his/her [DATE] article “[ARTICLE NAME],” [AUTHOR] called mitochondrial disease a “rare disease” about which little is known. While there is still more to be learned, we actually know a great deal about mitochondrial disease.

We know that:

- More than one in 4,000 children in the United States will develop a mitochondrial disease by the age of 10;
- Each year between 1,000 and 4,000 in the U.S. are born with a type of mitochondrial disease;
- The reason for this broad range is that majority of these diseases are very difficult to diagnose;
- This is a disease which has no effective treatment and no cure; and
- While symptoms vary greatly, mitochondrial disease can lead to muscle weakness, blindness, deafness, even unexplained strokes and seizures, and eventually death.
- Mitochondrial dysfunction has been implicated in Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, osteoporosis, cancer and the aging process itself.

In fact, the National Institutes of Health recently recognized the importance of mitochondrial disease research by considering mitochondrial disease for an NIH Roadmap for Medical Research. We must act now to ensure the Roadmap is approved and adequately funded.

Committing the appropriate resources to examining mitochondrial disease and mitochondrial dysfunction now could not only help to develop better treatments and diagnostics for mitochondrial disease; it could also help researchers to open a new world of medical knowledge and pave the way for developing better diagnostics and treatments for a range of other diseases – ultimately alleviating suffering and transforming medicine as we know it.

I urge [NAME OF PAPER] and your readers to contact your elected officials and tell them you support increased research funding for mitochondrial disease research. We can’t afford not to.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[AFFILIATION]

[DAY, EVENING, AND CELL PHONE NUMBERS]

[E-MAIL ADDRESS]