

Physical Disability Fact Sheet

What is a physical disability?

- **Conditions that affect one's physical body** can lead to a physical disability.
- There is a **wide range of conditions which can cause a physical disability**, such as an acquired brain injury, cerebral palsy, Multiple Sclerosis (MS), spinal cord injuries, spina bifida, arthritis and accident injuries or amputations.
- Furthermore, people with **respiratory or cardiac conditions** may experience **difficulties with mobility**, such as those with cystic fibrosis.
- Remember – it **may not always be obvious** that a student has a physical disability.

How can a physical disability affect a student's college experience?

Difficulty	Possible impact in College
Accessibility to college environment & facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties with physical access to buildings, classrooms and other college facilities. • Difficulties with appropriate physical access on course field trips and activities outside of the classroom, as well as society events. • Difficulties moving from one location to another in a short space of time. • May require assistance for accessing library and lab material (e.g. books or equipment on high shelves etc.).
Completing college assignments and exams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties with writing for long or short periods of time. • Managing the use of a computer or scribe for exams, if applicable.
Fatigue and/or pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on the student's disability, they may experience fatigue and/or pain which may impact their attendance and participation within college. • Fatigue and/or pain can be exacerbated during periods of high stress, such as when deadlines are due or exams.
Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue and/or pain may impact a student's attendance. • Difficulties with accessing public transport. • May have to attend medical appointments off campus.
Other difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing the use of a personal assistant (PA), if applicable. • Students who have recently acquired a physical disability may experience emotional difficulties.

To find out more, please visit:

- <https://www.ahead.ie/inclusiveteaching>

How can you support a student who has a physical disability?

1. Student-Centred Approach:

- If you are in doubt about how to support a student at any time, **ask the student** – they are the experts of their own needs!
- Create a space for students to **feel comfortable approaching you with any issues** (e.g. provide contact and student office hour details etc.).
- Implement any [classroom](#) and [exam](#) accommodations which were determined at the **student's Needs Assessment**.
- **Be aware that students may tire of fatigue easily**. Ensure to plan breaks or rest periods during lectures, class tests and labs.
- **Always ask the student if they require assistance** before doing so.
- If a student is experiencing difficulty getting around UCD campus, inform them about the UCD Access and Lifelong Learning's ['Getting Around UCD' video series](#).

2. Teaching and Learning:

- Be guided by [Universal Design principles](#) when designing coursework. Emphasis should be placed on **'Principles 6: Low Physical Effort'**, to ensure students with a physical disability are enabled to participate to the best of their ability without the need for unnecessary physical exertion.
- Furthermore, **offering breaks during longer classes or labs** can help students who are struggling with fatigue and concentration difficulties.
- Consider the needs of students with physical disabilities when **booking rooms and organising events** (i.e. is the building and/or room accessible?)
- **Permit the student to use Assistive Technology** in the classroom (e.g. recording device, laptop etc.).
- **Provide lecture notes in advance of the class**. This reduced the amount of written notes a student will have to take, and provides students who may have to be away from class at times with an opportunity to catch-up with material (e.g. for attending appointments, illness, fatigue).
- Consider the student's needs when **planning field trips or other activities**.
- **Be understanding if a student is late for class**, it may take them longer than others to get there.
- Consider the **exam needs of the student for in-class or mid-semester exams** (e.g. does the student require a computer/assistive technology/scribe?).
- Support the student if they have **difficulties meeting deadlines**, as they may experience difficulties meeting deadlines due to hospitalisation, exhaustion or other effects.