

Significant Ongoing Illness Fact Sheet

What is a Significant Ongoing Illness?

- A significant on-going illness is a medical condition that has a persistent and substantial effect on the health of an individual.
- Significant on-going illnesses include Epilepsy, Diabetes, Cystic Fibroses, Multiple Sclerosis, Crohn’s Disease, Fibromyalgia, Haemophilia, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and many more.

How can a significant ongoing illness affect a student’s college experience?

Difficulty	Possible impact in College
Accessibility to college environment & facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May require access to equipment and medication in class or in exams • 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, if experiencing fatigue/ pain and/or nausea.
Completing college assignments and exams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine- motor activities may be affected e.g. handwriting. • Difficulties with writing for long or short periods of time. • Managing the use of a computer or scribe for exams, if applicable. • Missing deadlines due to hospitalisation or other effects of the illness. <p>Examples of significant ongoing illnesses’ affecting performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Epilepsy - Periods of excessive stress such as exam periods or nearing assessment deadlines may bring on seizures which may result in missing deadlines or exams. • Diabetes - Periods of excessive stress can result in students’ blood sugar becoming difficult to regulate. This can result in poor concentration levels or extreme fatigue for the student.

Fatigue and/or pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depending on the student's illness, they may experience fatigue and/or pain which may impact their attendance and participation within college. Fatigue and/or pain/ effects of illness can be exacerbated during periods of high stress, such as when deadlines are due or exams. Medications often have side-effects including fatigue, nausea and disrupted sleep patterns.
Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fatigue and/or pain may impact a student's attendance. Difficulties with accessing public transport. Missing days or weeks of classes due to hospitalization/ appointments off campus or other effects of the illness
Other difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the use of equipment and medication if applicable. Students who have recently acquired a significant ongoing illness may experience emotional difficulties. Poor concentration due to fatigue and/or pain

How can you support a student who has a significant ongoing illness?

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 of the [symptoms of a seizure](#) in the case that a student **may require immediate medical attention** and understanding your [programme's policy](#) on how best to manage medical emergency.
- **Be aware that students may 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](#). Encourage them to plan their journey in advance and support them to identify areas where they can allocate a break.

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 an illness affecting fatigue 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 a significant ongoing illness when **booking rooms and organising events** (i.e. is the building and/or room accessible and does the student have access to needed equipment?)
- **Avoid the use of invasive lighting** in the teaching environment and lecture content (flashing lights, bright lights) which may trigger a seizure. If doing so, please inform the student in advance of lecture/tutorial/lab.
- **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 reduces 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 due to hospitalisation, exhaustion or other effects of illness.
- If there is more than one student with **Cystic Fibrosis** in the class it may be necessary to ensure that they are placed in separate tutorial groups due to the **risk of cross contamination**. Similarly, they may need to sit apart from each other in lectures. If you notice that there is more than one student with Cystic Fibrosis in your class, **please alert the Disability Adviser** who will liaise with the students regarding appropriate arrangements.

To find out more, please visit:

- <https://www.ahead.ie/inclusiveteaching>
- www.epilepsy.ie
- www.cfireland.ie
- www.diabetes.ie