

Students with Other Disabilities



GENERAL INFORMATION

There are many conditions recognized as disabilities which do not fall into traditional disability categories. Some of these conditions may be “invisible” to the naked eye but substantially affect students’ abilities to perform daily activities and interfere with academic functioning.

It is impossible to identify specific accommodations appropriate for each disorder due to the variation of symptoms among individuals; most often, however, students will require flexibility in attendance policies, permission to leave class early or abruptly, extended testing time, etc. An understanding of the nature of some of the disorders will encourage understanding for the need for accommodations. Listed below are descriptions of some of the more prevalent “other” disabilities that may affect students.

HIV/ACQUIRED IMMUNE

DEFICIENCY SYNDROME (AIDS)

HIV/AIDS is a condition caused by a virus which destroys the body’s immune system leaving it susceptible to life-threatening infections and cancers. The virus is primarily transmitted through exchanges of bodily fluid or through the sharing of needles; it is not transmitted through casual contact.

HIV or AIDS manifests itself differently in each individual. Academic accommodations for those with HIV or AIDS seek to alleviate the difficulties arising from symptoms or side effects of medication.

The law protects the confidentiality of those with HIV or AIDS. Due to the general misunderstanding surrounding HIV/AIDS, it is extremely important to strictly observe the confidential nature of the conditions of students with HIV or AIDS.

CANCER

Due to the variety of types and degrees of cancer, students with cancer may experience various degrees of disabling effects from cancer. Effects might include pain, visual difficulties, loss of balance and coordination, lack of endurance, backaches, drowsiness, joint pain, bleeding, anemia, lethargy, and difficulty swallowing or breathing. Cancer treatment may include surgery, radiation therapy, or anticancer drugs. These treatments may cause a wide range of side effects including loss of sensation, memory lapses, or language problems.

RESPIRATORY DISORDERS

TUBERCULOSIS: This is an infectious disease caused by a bacterium passed through airborne droplets. TB affects lung functioning causing coughing, chest pain, shortness of breath, fever, sweating, and weight loss. Those with TB may undergo treatment with antibiotics.

EMPHYSEMA: This is a disease of the lungs which may cause shortness of breath, respiratory and/or heart failure, a barrel-shaped chest, and chronic coughing.

BRONCHIECTASIS: This is a lung disorder which distorts respiratory air passages and results in chronic lung infections, coughing, and/or shortness of breath.

CHRONIC BRONCHITIS: This disorder is an inflammation of respiratory airways resulting in persistent coughing and/or shortness of breath.

SEIZURE DISORDERS

Seizures, transient neurological abnormalities, are brain dysfunctions which stem from a wide variety of diseases or injuries resulting in imbalances in the electrical activities of the brain. The following are some types of seizure disorders which students may experience.

GRAND MAL SEIZURES: They result in unconsciousness, stiffness of the body, uncontrollable jerking or twitching, irregular breathing, and/or muscle relaxation.

PETIT MAL SEIZURES: These result in momentary loss of consciousness without abnormal movement. They may be characterized by staring or eye blinking and may often go unnoticed.

Students with such disorders may experience seizures during times of stress, fatigue, or infectious disease. By avoiding such situations and taking prescribed medications, students can reduce the frequency of seizure episodes.

DIABETES

Diabetes mellitus is one of the most common types of diabetes. It is a condition in which the pancreas produces too little insulin resulting in excessive urination and constant hunger or thirst. Students with diabetes may experience fatigue, weight loss, weakness, blurred vision, increased appetite, or numbness. Treatment may include combinations of weight control, physical activity, dietary management, and insulin injections.

HEART DISEASE

Heart disorders can result from genetic conditions, congenital defects, infections, tumors, muscle disorders, injuries, nutritional disorders, or drug or alcohol poisoning. Such disorders usually result in restrictions on physical activity due to pain, breathlessness, fatigue, spells, or anxiety.

LUPUS

Lupus is a chronic, autoimmune disorder in which the immune system attacks connective tissues causing inflammation. The symptoms—rashes, fatigue, nausea, fever, loss of appetite, weight loss, joint pain—periodically subside and recur with varying degrees of severity. While there is no cure, drug treatment reduces symptoms.

SICKLE CELL ANEMIA

Sickle cell anemia is an inherited disease which primarily occurs in those of African-American or Mediterranean origin. The disease stems from the abnormality of red blood cells and results in chronic and severe anemia, a reduction in the blood’s ability to carry oxygen. Symptoms include headaches, shortness of breath, fatigue, pallor, jaundice, or pain. There is no cure, but symptoms can be treated through intravenous infusions, antibiotics, oxygen therapy, and analgesic drugs.

EATING DISORDERS

ANOREXIA NERVOSA: This is an eating disorder characterized by an intense fear of being fat, severe weight loss, and possible amenorrhoea. Common features include weight loss, overactivity, tiredness, weakness, extreme choosiness over food, induced vomiting and abuse of laxatives. Treatment usually involves a controlled refeeding program combined with psychotherapy and/or family counseling.

BULIMIA: This disorder is characterized by bouts of gross overeating followed by self-induced vomiting. It is considered a psychiatric disorder, and it results in dehydration, potassium deficiency, weakness, and often depression