

CHRONIC HEALTH DISABILITIES

Chronic Health disabilities are conditions affecting one or more of the body's systems. These include the respiratory, immunological, neurological and circulatory systems. There are many kinds of systemic impairments, varying significantly in their effects and symptoms; below are brief descriptions of some of the more common types.

CANCER is a malignant growth that can affect any part of the body. Treatment can be time-consuming, painful and sometimes result in permanent disability.

CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY is considered a disabling condition when it is documented that a person has received treatment for a drug or alcohol addiction and is not currently using. Chemical dependency can cause permanent cognitive impairments and carries with it a great deal of stigma.

CROHN'S DISEASE is a disorder of the gastrointestinal tract that is characterized by inflammation and deep ulcer formation in the lining of any region of the tract from the mouth to the anus. It is one of the diagnoses more generally referred to as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), and may also be called regional enteritis.

DIABETES MELLITUS causes a person to lose the ability to regulate blood sugar. People with diabetes often need to follow a strict diet and may require insulin injections. During a diabetic reaction, a person may experience confusion, sudden personality changes or loss of consciousness. In extreme cases, diabetes can also cause vision loss, cardiovascular disease, kidney failure, stroke or necessitate the amputation of limbs.

EPILEPSY/SEIZURE DISORDER causes a person to experience a loss of consciousness. Episodes or seizures, vary from short absence or "petit mal" seizures to the less common "grand mal." Seizures are frequently controlled by medications and are most often not emergency situations.

EPSTEIN BARR VIRUS/CHRONIC FATIGUE SYNDROME is an autoimmune disorder which causes extreme fatigue, loss of appetite and depression. Physical or emotional stress may adversely affect a person with this condition.

FIBROMYALGIA, a neurosomatic disorder, is a debilitating syndrome that is characterized by widespread pain including; muscle pain, tender bones and tendons, aching, stiffness, difficulty sleeping, depression and fatigue or loss of energy. Headaches and jaw pain are also common. People with Fibromyalgia can be sensitive to odors, bright lights and loud noises.

HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (HIV+), which causes AIDS, inhibits one's ability to fight off illness and infections. Symptoms vary greatly. People with HIV or AIDS are often stigmatized.

IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME (IBS) is a disorder that interferes with the normal functions of the large intestine (colon). It is characterized by a group of symptoms--cramping abdominal pain, bloating, constipation, and diarrhea. One in five Americans has IBS, making it one of the most common disorders diagnosed by doctors. It occurs more often in women than in men, and it usually begins around age 20. IBS causes a great deal of discomfort and distress, but it does not permanently harm the intestines and does not lead to intestinal bleeding or to any serious disease such as cancer. Most people can control their symptoms with diet, stress management, and medications prescribed by their physician. But for some people, IBS can be disabling. They may be unable to work, go to social events, or travel even short distances.

LYME'S DISEASE is a multisystemic condition which can cause paralysis, fatigue, fever, dermatitis, sleeping problems, memory dysfunction, cognitive difficulties and depression.

LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSIS can cause inflammatory lesions, neurological problems, extreme fatigue, persistent flu-like symptoms, impaired cognitive ability and connective tissue dysfunction and mobility impairments. Lupus most often affects young women.

MULTIPLE CHEMICAL SENSITIVITY (MCS) often results from prolonged exposure to chemicals. A person with MCS becomes increasingly sensitive to chemicals found in everyday environments. Reactions can be caused by cleaning products, pesticides, petroleum products, vehicle exhaust, tobacco smoke, room deodorizers, perfumes and scented personal products. Though reactions vary, nausea, rashes, light-headedness and respiratory distress are common to MCS.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS (MS) is a progressive neurological condition with a variety of symptoms, such as loss of strength, numbness, vision impairments, tremors and depression. The intensity of MS symptoms can vary greatly; one day a person might be extremely fatigued and the next day feel strong. Extreme temperatures can also adversely affect a person with MS.

NARCOLEPSY, is a disorder marked by sudden and uncontrollable drowsiness and attacks of sleep at unexpected and irregular intervals. The sleep attacks may last minutes or hours and vary in frequency from a few to many in a single day.

RENAL DISEASE/FAILURE can result in loss of bladder control, extreme fatigue, pain and toxic reactions that can cause cognitive difficulties. Some people with renal disease are on dialysis and have to adhere to a rigid schedule.

Some considerations:

- Students affected by systemic disabilities differ from those with other disabilities because systemic disabilities are often unstable. This causes a person's condition to vary; therefore, the need for and type of reasonable accommodations may also change.
- Some common accommodations for students with systemic disabilities include conveniently located parking, notetakers, extended time to complete a task, modified course or workload, flexible deadlines, relocation of a meeting or class, early syllabus and exam modifications.

Instructional Strategies

Systemic disabilities often require instructional strategies similar to those listed for other disability conditions. The use of such strategies will depend on how the disability is manifested. If a faculty member would like more information about instructional strategies for students with systemic disabilities, he or she should contact Disability and Academic Support Services.

Documentation for this disability, as with all disabilities, is required before services can be provided.