

## Health Impairments

There are a range of medical diagnoses and subsequent health problems that may have a temporary or chronic impact on a student's academic performance. Several common health impairments include:

- **Cancer** – malignant growth that can affect any part of the body
- **Chronic Fatigue Syndrome** – extreme fatigue that does not improve with rest; characterized by muscle pain, sleep problems, loss of appetite, memory problems, and/or decreased ability to think clearly and concentrate
- **Diabetes Mellitus** – inability of the body to regulate blood sugar; during a diabetic incident an individual may experience confusion, sudden personality changes, or loss of consciousness; common symptoms include fatigue, increased thirst, and blurred vision; frequently controlled by medication
- **Epilepsy** – group of disorders characterized by recurrent seizures; symptoms depend on type of epilepsy and location of disturbance; an individual may experience loss of consciousness and may have memory problems as a result of seizure activity; frequently controlled by medication
- **Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)** – gradual deterioration of the immune system leaving the body with an inability to fight off illness and infections; symptoms vary greatly
- **Multiple Chemical Sensitivity** – sensitivity to chemicals found in everyday environment; reactions vary, by typical reactions include nausea, rashes, light-headedness, and respiratory distress

Unless the impairment is neurological in nature, health impairments are not likely to directly affect learning. However, the secondary effects of the impairment (i.e. possible psychiatric impairments) and the side effects of medication can have a significant impact on memory, attention, strength, endurance, and energy levels. A student's physical ability will vary; therefore the need for accommodations, as well as the specific accommodations needed, will change. Some health impairments, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, can be classified as "invisible" disabilities because they are not as readily apparent as other types of disabilities such as mobility impairments or sensory impairments.

Health impairments can result in a range of academic challenges for a student, for example:

- A student with chronic fatigue syndrome may find sitting for prolonged periods of time difficult and may require a stretch break during class

- A student with epilepsy who is at risk for seizure activity may need instructions provided to his/her instructors to make them aware of how to respond if the student should have a seizure during class
- A student with HIV who has many medical complications may need consideration for additional absences

**Common Accommodations provided in the classroom by the instructor:**

- Access to class notes
- Tape recordings of class lectures
- Flexibility with attendance
- Additional time to complete assignments
- Extended test time
- Availability of lecture notes, learning materials, practice tests, etc., in electronic format
- Accessible classrooms and classroom locations (any problems see Student Disability Services)

**General classroom considerations:**

- Syllabi with clear and well organized information regarding materials, readings, test dates, assignment/project deadlines, etc. can help students plan organize and prioritize requirements

**For more information on working with students with health impairments go to:** <http://www.washington.edu/doit/Faculty>