1. Facts & Figures

☐ A chronic illness is an illness that persists for a long period of time. These conditions are either congenital or acquired and can be stable in time, deteriorate or improve.

☐ Common illnesses that have an impact on higher education are cancer, diabetes, epilepsy, Crohn’s disease, cystic fibrosis, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, asthma, allergies.

☐ Depending on the nature and severity of the illness, the impact is different and other symptoms are present. Besides the condition specific symptoms, other general symptoms are often present: lowered resistance, fatigue, pain, reduced mobility and reduced life quality.

☐ In higher education, students with a chronic illness often experience several problems:
  ☐ Lessons, exams, internships are missed due to medical or paramedial follow-up and care, fatigue and illness. This can lead to study delay and as a result deadlines are sometimes missed.
  ☐ There are often problems with taking readable and complete notes due to fatigue and concentration difficulties, motor disabilities or absence from classes.
  ☐ Lower study rate due to fatigue and problems with concentration.
  ☐ Due to unforeseen inactivity, medical care, fatigue and concentration problems, problems with time management and planning can occur.
  ☐ If motor or sensory problems are present, problems with accessibility in infrastructure, lectures and instruments can occur.
 Symptoms of stress, fatigue and overload can be present. These symptoms are related to the disability itself or the extra burden the disability causes.

 There can be reduced social contact due to frequent absences.

 The percentage of individuals with a chronic illness increases with age. In young people between the age of 15 and 24 it is 9.6%, in the group of 75-year old people it is 48.8%.

2. Focus points, Tips and Tricks

 Attending classes

 Focus points

 - Taking readable, complete and well-structured notes is challenging.
 - Due to absence not all classes can be followed, leading to a delay in the processing of course material.
 - Medical procedures are sometimes required during classes.
 - Independent transportation to and from campus and lecture rooms can be difficult.

 Tips and tricks

 - PowerPoint presentations with adequate structure, delivered before classes, enhance the process of taking structured and complete notes.
 - Using a laptop can contribute to taking readable and complete notes, which facilitates the processing of information.
 - Copies of notes of fellow students can have substantial added value in addition to one’s own notes.
 - Lecture recordings that are made available online after classes, offer the opportunity to review difficult passages and complete notes.
 - The possibility to ask lecturers additional questions, can help eliminate confusion or ambiguities due to absence of classes.
 - It is advisable to put a space or room at the disposal of the student where medical procedures can be performed and were it is possible to rest. Leaving class early should be allowed.
During classes the follow-up of medical prescriptions should be allowed e.g. drinking, taking medication, standing up, ....

Support in mobility issues is sometimes needed e.g. transport to and from campus/lecture rooms. The use of an elevator or having a parking place at campus can be supportive.

Planning and organizing study-related activities

Focus points

- Due to absence certain information is missed leading to a lack of overview on all study activities.
- Due to unforeseen inactivity, exhaustion, and difficulties with concentration deviations from the study plan are necessary leading to problems with time management.

Tips and tricks

- Providing an overview of all assignments and tasks helps to create an overview and make up an efficient study plan.
- Study coaching can be useful to help make up a realistic plan and help determine which tasks are proprietary, how much time can be spent on specific tasks, when rest can be incorporated, ....

Processing and rehearsing study materials

Focus points

- The pace at which study material is processed is slow.

Tips and tricks

- Support in the draft of a realistic study plan enhances the process of study materials.
- An individual trajectory with a reduced study load is sometimes appropriate.
Assignments

Focus points

- Frequent absences, exhaustion, frequent medical follow-up can hinder the termination of assignments within the provided time.
- Active participation in group assignments can be difficult due to frequent absences.

Tips and tricks

- Changing deadlines can be advisable in specific situations.
- Large assignments such as bachelor- or master theses can be split up in partial assignments where progress is monitored.
- For group assignments additional agreements on the division of workload by the lecturer are necessary.

Exams

Focus points

- Fatigue and concentration difficulties can hamper the successful termination of an exam.
- During exams the follow-up of medical prescriptions is sometimes necessary e.g. drinking, taking medication, standing up, ...
- Due to absence exams cannot be taken at the provided time.

Tips and tricks

- Taking exams in a separate room where medical prescription can be followed are advisable. A more quiet room is also advisable in case of concentration difficulties.
- Extra time for the preparation of an oral exam or for a written exam can help compensate for the concentration difficulties.
- Providing the opportunity for an alternative exam form can be supportive.
- An exam that is divided in two parts, makes it possible to rest in between.
- An optimal spread of exams within an exam period can compensate for the overload and slower processing speed.
Internships

Focus points

- **Transportation** to and from the internship location can be hampered due to motor and sensory problems.
- Due to medical follow-ups, exhaustion, or illness frequent **absences** can hinder the internship.
- During the internship **medical procedures** are sometimes necessary e.g. drinking or eating, taking medication, standing up or moving, ...

Tips and tricks

- Spreading an internship over a longer period of time can be useful.
- An **accessible internship location** can remedy mobility issues and reduce exhaustion.
- Providing a **quiet room** at the facility where the student can retreat and perform the necessary medical procedures is advisable.

Student life

Focus points

- Participation in student activities and the associated **social contacts** with peers and can be challenging.
- Living independently and being **self-reliant** can be challenging.
- Finding a **new balance** between attending classes, medical procedures, living in dorms (grocery shopping, cooking, studying, ...) and creating a new network can take time.
- These challenges can have an impact on the **well-being**. Stress, anxiety and loneliness can occur.

Tips and tricks

- Support in finding a **new balance** between attending classes, medical procedures, living in dorms (grocery shopping, cooking, studying, ...) and creating a new network can make a great difference.
- Support can be provided in **ADL-activities** through projects such as framed living. Additionally, support in the development of a structure,
new routines and the organization of the paramedical support system (physiotherapy, nursing, ...) is important.

- Mentoring or buddy programs (where students are assigned a mentor) can play an effective supporting role.
- A fixed contact person in the study program can help monitor the load limit and help look for solutions in case of difficulties.
- Staff members of student facilities provide for coaching in case of psycho-social problems.