

## 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 paramedical 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 & 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 were **medical procedures** can be performed and were it is possible to rest. Leaving class early should be allowed.

# STUDYING WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

Facts & figures, focus points, tips & tips

- 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**.

# STUDYING WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

Facts & figures, focus points, tips & tricks

## 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 work load 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.