

Physical Disability Fact Sheet

What is physical disability?

- **Conditions that affect one's physical body** can lead to a physical disability.
- There is a **wide range of conditions which can cause physical disability**, such as an acquired brain injury, cerebral palsy, Multiple Sclerosis (MS), spinal cord injuries, spina bifida, arthritis and accident injuries or amputations.
- Furthermore, people with **respiratory or cardiac conditions** may experience **difficulties with mobility**, such as those with cystic fibrosis.
- Remember – it **may not always be obvious** that a student has a physical disability.

How can physical disability affect a student's college experience?

Difficulty	Possible impact in college
Accessibility to college environment & facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties with physical access to buildings, classrooms and other college facilities. • Difficulties with appropriate physical access on course field trips and activities outside of the classroom, as well as society events. • Difficulties moving from one location to another in a short space of time. • May require assistance with accessing the library and lab material (e.g. books or equipment on high shelves etc.).
Completing college assignments and exams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties with writing for long or short periods of time. • Managing the use of a computer or scribe for exams, if applicable.
Fatigue and/or pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on the student's disability, they may experience fatigue and/or pain which may impact on their attendance and participation within college. • Fatigue and/or pain can be exacerbated during periods of high stress, such as when deadlines are due or exams.
Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue and/or pain may impact a student's attendance. • Difficulties with accessing public transport. • May have to attend medical appointments off campus.
Other difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing the use of a personal assistant (PA), if applicable. • Students who have recently acquired physical disability may experience emotional difficulties.

How can you support a student who has a physical disability?

1. Student-Centred Approach:

- If you are in doubt about how to support a student at any time, **ask the student** – they are the experts of their own needs!
- Create a space for students to **feel comfortable approaching you with any issues** (e.g. provide contact and student office hour details etc.).
- Implement any classroom and exam accommodations which were determined at the **student's Needs Assessment**.
- **Be aware that students may be tired of fatigue easily.** Ensure to plan breaks or rest periods during lectures, class tests and labs.
- **Always ask the student if they require assistance** before doing so.
- If a student is experiencing difficulty getting around UCD campus, inform them about the UCD Access and Lifelong Learning's 'Getting Around UCD video series.'

2. Teaching and Learning:

- Be guided by Universal Design principles when designing coursework. Emphasis should be placed on '**Principles 6: Low Physical Effort**', to ensure students with a physical disability are enabled to participate to the best of their ability without the need for unnecessary physical exertion.
- Furthermore, **offering breaks during longer classes or labs** can help students who are struggling with fatigue and concentration difficulties.
- Consider the needs of students with physical disabilities when **booking rooms and organising events** (i.e. is the building and/or room accessible?)
- **Permit the student to use Assistive Technology** in the classroom (e.g. recording device, laptop etc.).
- **Provide lecture notes in advance of the class.** This reduces the amount of written notes a student will have to take and provides students who may have to be away from class at times with an opportunity to catch up with material (e.g. for attending appointments, illness, fatigue).
- Consider the student's needs when **planning field trips or other activities**.
- **Be understanding if a student is late for class**, it may take them longer than others to get there.
- Consider the **exam needs of the student for in-class or mid-semester exams** (e.g. does the student require a computer/assistive technology/scribe?).
- Support the students if they have **difficulties meeting deadlines**, as they may experience difficulties meeting deadlines due to hospitalisation, exhaustion or other effects.

To find out more, please visit:

[Inclusive Teaching Strategies](#)