

# Living with IBD The Transition to University/College

Transitioning from high school to university/college can be a stressful time in our life. It's a period jam packed with change on the mental, physical, emotional and social fronts. We aren't just striving to meet the academic challenges of university, but we are also adjusting to living away from home, building relationships with new friends and professors, taking responsibility for ourselves and making key life decisions. As we juggle with all this we have to remember to *take responsibility for our own health*. Now that you're on your own, it's important to learn how to manage your own healthcare needs.

## The Truths about Transitioning:

Shopping and cooking: There are numerous jokes about the freshman five pounds that result from poor diet and alcohol. Be smart. For someone with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) recognize that being responsible with your diet and meals is crucial to staying healthy.

You are your own caretaker. No one else is around to recognize when you are on the verge of a flare-up. Pay careful attention to yourself and learn to recognize the symptoms of your disease.

When you are sick, you have to make your own chicken soup. Learn ways to cope with your stress and create your own support networks at school.

Create a plan for your academic career. Keep yourself organized and on track, and have safeguards in place for times when you need them.

## Academic Tips:

- Avail of every tool you can get your hands on - palm pilots, student planners, etc. . to organize yourself. The more prepared you are, the less stressful your life will be.
- To avoid frantically searching for a bathroom during an emergency, take the time before hand to seek out bathrooms. Schedule a tour of the campus or spend a day wandering the different buildings looking for bathrooms (especially ones with less traffic).

## You Need to Know:

*...IBD is considered a disability so check out the **DISABILITY OFFICE** and find out what kind of assistance you can get... parking permits, elevator passes, private exam rooms*

*...Your **CAMPUS** map. Get to know where the bathrooms are and find a route that works for you.*

*...The best way to handle **MISSED EXAMS** and figure out **CREDIT RECOVERY**. Talk to your academic advisor or enquire at the disability office before this happens ...be prepared.*

*... Your **IBD** is no reason to hold back. There is no need to be afraid of taking the next step and moving away from home because of it. There is a lot of support available to help you along the way.*

- Check out your University's Disability Assistance Program (if one exists)
  - IBD is considered a physical disability and you are entitled to assistance
- Find out the perks you are entitled to at the Disability Office - private exam rooms with washroom access? Extra time? Assistance in speaking to your professors? Extensions on exams and assignments? Note takers?
- Get an original letter and all necessary medical documentation from your GI that details your condition. Give out copies as needed and keep the original.
- Missed Exams/Credit Recovery: Every university/college has its own policies on missed exams and credit recovery. The key is enquiring about these issues *before* you get to that point. Schedule an appointment with an academic advisor or someone at the disability center to discuss your options before you start classes. If you do miss classes or exams due to your illness, make sure you inform the proper individuals at the University/college. If you are unable to do this yourself, have someone - a family member or trustworthy friend - contact the university for you. Due to privacy issues, universities/colleges may not allow anyone to speak or act on your behalf unless you have filled out the proper forms giving that person permission.
- You may want to make an appointment to personally inform your professors about your IBD, even if you are in remission. That way, if your health worsens and you suddenly need assistance, they will already be aware and be more likely to assist you.
- Make arrangements with professors and classmates to get notes for classes that you miss. Ask one of your friends to be your official note-taker
- Get help as soon as you need it - Don't be shy or embarrassed! You don't want to push yourself too hard and fall further behind in school, or make yourself more sick from the stress.

### Medical Tips

- Create a contact list of all your important health care providers. Suggestions of whom to include: family doctor, gastroenterologist, pharmacy, infusion coordinator, dietician, nutritionist.
- Have your provincial healthcare card on you at all times. If possible get a plastic casing to protect your card.
- Keep all your important medical documents in one file. If you have a standing order blood requisition form, keep it easily accessible to ensure that you keep up with your blood work.
- Watch your butt. Keep your GI updated with any changes, or lack thereof, concerning your IBD.
- In a flare, adjust your diet accordingly and don't wait for someone to get on your back about it.
- Attend to all facets of your life: don't focus on just your IBD symptoms. Expect a good quality of life. Seek improvements in all areas of your life that need improving.

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