

RESOURCES AND STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE WITH AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE

High school and college can be challenging for any student, but for those living with chronic conditions like autoimmune disease, it can come with unique hurdles. These tips and strategies can help you advocate for yourself and get the support and resources you need.

Navigating Special Diets

Navigating restricted diets like dairy and gluten-free on a high school or university campus can be challenging for autoimmune patients. However, many schools recognize the importance of accommodating these dietary needs and offer various resources to support students.



Most universities offer allergen-free handbooks online that give you guidance on how to navigate your university life with a restricted diet. We recommend searching “[Your school’s name] Allergen Guide” – this will help you discover resources that could ease your dining difficulties.

Accessing Parking and Building Entries

Navigating a university campus and its buildings can be challenging, especially those living with physical limitations. High schools and universities are required to implement measures to ensure that students with disabilities, including autoimmune conditions, can access all campus facilities. For example, they must provide ramps, elevators, and automatic doors to eliminate physical barriers. Additionally, they must offer designated parking spaces closer to buildings for students with mobility impairments.



Find out if your school provides a map that illustrates options for accessible parking and entryways. If not, offer to collaborate with them to create one!

Managing Pain and Fatigue

School can be challenging when you're experiencing pain and fatigue. There are a few steps you can take to support yourself during times of increased pain or fatigue:

- **Establish formal accommodations:** Establishing formal accommodations with your college or university can protect you during flare-ups. It is best to apply for accommodations before classes start. The school you are attending should have a person or group of people, likely called Accessibility Services—that helps students set up these programs. If your school does not, consider reaching out to an orientation counselor, dean, or student union representative.
- **Reach out to teachers and professors at the start of the semester:** While it may seem intimidating at first, meeting with your professors or teaching assistants at the beginning of the semester to introduce yourself and your accessibility plan. It is not necessary to disclose what condition(s) you are living with (unless you would like to) but alerting the professor to what kind of accommodations you have been granted helps to make sure everyone is on the same page. If you are uncomfortable having this conversation on your own, consider reaching out to accessibility services to see if there is a representative that can accompany you to this meeting.
- **Engage with treatments:** During times of increased pain or fatigue, it can be difficult to keep up with responsibilities related to your treatment or condition management. It is important to communicate with your treatment providers if you are struggling to keep up with treatment tasks to coordinate a plan that works best for you.

Extracurricular Accommodations

Extracurricular activities such as club participation are an important part of the college experience, and students with disabilities should have the opportunity to participate in these activities. Reaching out to student organizations to see about accommodations to attend meetings and events in a way that works for you is one way to help with your inclusion.



If you are leading a student organization or planning an event, Northwestern University has a guide for creating accessible events. Find the guide [here](#).

For More Resources

For more information, tools, and support designed specifically for young adults, visit our Young Adult Resources webpage at autoimmune.org/young-adults.