

IBD UNIVERSITY

A Professor's Guide to IBD



Supporting Your Students with IBD

A Crash Course for Professors

This pamphlet has been developed by **IBD University**, a non-profit dedicated to providing resources and connection for students in higher education living with IBD. For more information about IBD University, please visit:

<https://www.ibduniversityinc.org/>

WHY YOU'RE READING THIS

There is a side of your student **you can't see...**



INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE (IBD)

IBD is an umbrella term used to describe autoimmune disorders that involve chronic inflammation of the digestive tract. The two forms of IBD are **Crohn's Disease & Ulcerative Colitis (UC)**. IBD is thought to be triggered by complex interactions between genetics and the environment but the exact cause is unknown.

IBD is a chronic autoimmune disease and registered disability. IBD is what's known as an invisible disability, or a condition that is not immediately apparent from looking at someone but can significantly impair normal activities of daily living. The difficulty of managing Crohn's or Ulcerative Colitis is compounded by the lack of awareness and knowledge surrounding the lived experience of young people with IBD.

Your student likely manages some combination of frequent doctor appointments, procedures, diet regimens and medications – all in addition to balancing the typical expectations of a college student. IBD looks different on everyone and understanding the individual needs of your student is the best thing you can do to help them succeed and support them in reaching their academic potential.

For more on IBD please visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/inflammatory-bowel-disease/about/index.html>

Understanding Your Student

Symptoms of IBD can occur regularly or sporadically, depending on the student.

Individuals with IBD often experience cycles of remission and flare-ups, with flare-ups marked by increased inflammation and a worsening of symptoms. Flare-ups often occur suddenly, causing a person to feel fine one day and then be in significant discomfort or pain the next. This unpredictability can make it difficult to manage academic responsibilities at times. Please consider the following which often characterize living with IBD:

I

Inconsistency

Inconsistency is one of the few predictable aspects of IBD. Even with careful preparation, your student's daily experience and their ability to accomplish tasks is often unpredictable and lies beyond their control. Flare-ups can come in waves and range in severity, often accompanied by secondary symptoms such as joint pain or chronic fatigue. Supporting your student involves trust, compassion, and a deep understanding of the challenges outside their control.

B

Betterment

Living with IBD involves a constant effort to improve. Whether it's managing daily symptoms, adjusting medication, or finding the right diet, each day is centered around progress. While symptoms can impact academic performance, rest assured that your student is doing everything they can to succeed and meet your expectations. Collaboration and transparency are key to helping your student reach their full academic potential.

D

Difficulty

Living with a chronic condition requires considerable strength and resilience. It is not easy to balance the daily demands of being a student with the ongoing responsibility of maintaining one's health. Your student may not need extra support this semester, but please be mindful of the many challenges they are consistently navigating behind the scenes.

Our day-to-day experience matters.

Symptoms of

The following signs are among the **most common** manifestations of IBD, though they do not encompass all possible symptoms. Experiences differ in severity and frequency for each individual.

Irritable Bowel Disease

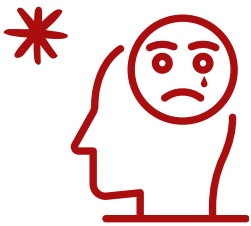


**chronic
pain**

abdominal & joint



**bowel urgency
& inconsistency**



**depression
& anxiety**

**chronic
fatigue**



**nausea &
vomiting**



**weight
loss**



* Young people with IBD experience mental health challenges at disproportionately high rates. At least one-third of college-aged students with IBD face difficulties with depression, anxiety, or both. We include these mental health issues as associated symptoms to help foster a deeper understanding of the lived experience of managing a chronic illness

For more on IBD & mental health, please visit: https://academic.oup.com/jcag/article/6/Supplement_2/S64/7260510

For more information on symptoms, please visit: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/inflammatory-bowel-disease>

Mind-Gut Connection

Although much is unknown about the mind-gut connection, a widely accepted theory speculates that **gut health**, including the integrity of the **microbiome** and **serotonin** made in the gut, is **directly linked** to the likelihood of developing depression and anxiety



The **gut-brain-microbiota axis** is a two-way communication system that allows intestinal microbes to communicate with the brain and vice versa

Central Nervous System

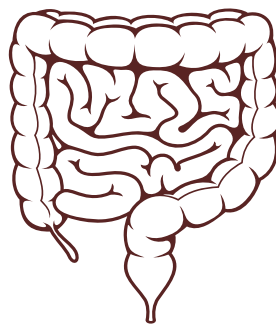
Neurotransmitters

Gut-Brain Axis

Overactivation of the immune system can **dysregulate neurotransmitters** involved in mood and emotional regulation

Immune Moderators

Microbiome



This system, which has not been entirely explored, is based on neural, endocrine, immunological and metabolic pathways

IBD is not confined to a physical disability; it almost always results in long-term mental health effects that can create an additional barrier for students trying to succeed in a college setting

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

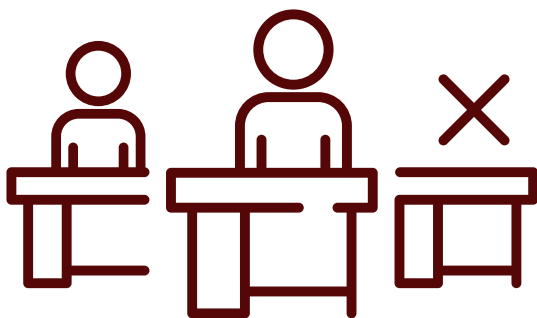
How IBD may Affect Your Student in the Classroom

The **frequency** of symptoms will fluctuate with the severity of your student's illness. Please keep this in mind when considering how to accommodate your student



Frequent Bathroom Breaks

Inability to turn in
assignments on time



Inability to
attend class

Now What?

If you have read through this far, thank you. We appreciate the time you have taken to try and understand some of the additional challenges your student may be experiencing.

Now: what can you do to best support your student?

Your student may have accommodations from the university's disability services office that outline what type of flexibility they deem appropriate. The first thing you can do to help your student is to truly understand that **accommodations for students are not excuses, they are equalizers**. They make it possible for students to succeed in the same way that the other, able-bodied students, in the class can.

The next best thing you can do is **be on your student's side**. It is already stressful enough to feel as if you are falling behind for reasons out of your control. Having a professor who has your back can be all the difference. If you can make your student feel like the two of you are on the same team, you will be helping your student reach their full academic potential. It might take flexibility, compassion, and grace, but with the right support, your student is fully capable of getting the most out of your class.

Please acknowledge the fact that the strength and reliability of disability services varies across the country. Often, bureaucratic policies will not account for the unique circumstances of your student, and additional communication with them may be required to sort out what the most appropriate expectations are.

A note to remember: you don't need to capitulate standards for your student. Nobody is asking for special treatment or an easy grade. Your student is in your class to learn. We are just asking you to consider how your student may best thrive in your class without compromising their physical and mental health.

Thank you for taking the time to try to understand the experience of your student and learn about IBD. It is difficult to express how invaluable your support is. Advocacy does not come easily, especially when it concerns a vulnerable topic such as chronic illness. Our mission is to help empower those with IBD in higher education and your support and understanding are crucial to reaching realizing our potential.

Sincerely,
Emma Adelstein
Founder & CEO of IBD University Inc.

If you have any follow up questions, concerns, or suggestions for how we can improve this resource please email us at admin@ibduniversity.org and we will be more than happy to discuss them!