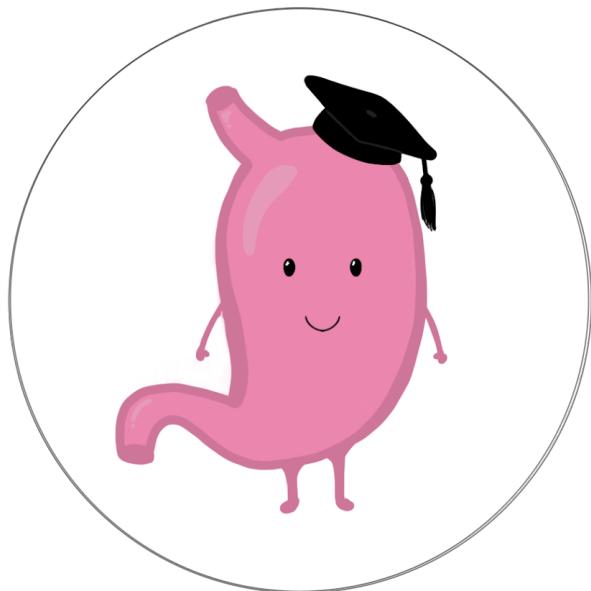


# *A Professor's Guide to IBD*



## *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 a community for college students living with IBD. It was developed by students, not clinical staff, but it has been reviewed for accuracy by Tufts Health Services. 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 disorders that involve chronic inflammation of the digestive tract. The two types of IBD are **Crohn's Disease & Ulcerative Colitis (UC)**.

IBD is a chronic autoimmune disease that is also a registered disability. Unlike many other disabilities, this one is completely invisible. Looking at your student, you would believe you are looking at a perfectly healthy individual. You would never be able to tell that the person in front of you suffers from a variety of debilitating daily symptoms. The difficulty of managing IBD is compounded by the lack of awareness and knowledge surrounding the lived experience of young people with IBD. Your student with IBD has likely undergone testing, procedures, diet regimens, medications, and even surgery—all in addition to living a normal life as a college student. IBD looks different on everyone and the best thing you can do as a professor is understand the individual needs of your student, which is how you can help them succeed and support them in reaching their academic potential.

# Understanding Your Student

Symptoms of IBD may occur on a frequent basis or just occasionally, depending on the student. People with IBD experience 'flare ups': periods of time where symptoms are at their worst. Generally, flare ups happen quickly and without warning, meaning that someone may function perfectly well one day and be riddled with pain the next. Managing academics can be difficult at times, so please keep in mind the following elements about the day-to-day experience that your student could be having.

## I

## Inconsistent

Inconsistency is, ironically enough, one of the only consistencies of IBD. Regardless of how much your student prepares, the quality of their day-to-day experience is out of their control. Flare-ups happen in waves and vary in severity. Often, secondary symptoms like joint pain or chronic fatigue can flare up as well. Supporting your student requires trust, compassion, & understanding of what is outside your student's control.

## B

## Betterment

Having IBD means a life in which you are always trying to get better. Whether it's managing daily symptoms, figuring out the right medicine regime, or finding the diet that works, every day is focused on betterment. Symptoms can interfere with academics, but please trust that your student is doing everything in their power to learn. Collaboration and transparency are the best ways to ensure that your student reaches their full academic potential.

## D

## Difficulty

One important thing to know about your student: they are a strong person. This disease is not for the weak-spirited. It is likely your student may not need flexibility this semester, and they will blend in with all the other students. However, your student may have an unexpected absence, be unable to turn in an assignment on time, or require flexibility with the course material. Please recognize that this is out of your student's control.

Our day-to-day experience matters.

# Symptoms of

# Irritable Bowel Disease

The symptoms listed below do not represent *\*all\** symptoms of IBD, just the most common. Symptoms differ in severity and frequency for each individual.

chronic  
fatigue



weight  
loss



\* depression  
& anxiety



chronic  
pain  
*abdominal & joint*



nausea &  
vomiting



bowel urgency  
& inconsistency



\* There is no definitive evidence that mood disorders are a symptom of IBD, however, young people with IBD disproportionately suffer from mental health problems. At least 1/3 of college aged students with IBD struggle with one or both of these challenges. We list depression and anxiety as symptoms in an attempt to further the understanding of life with a chronic illness.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5664260/>

For more information on symptoms, please visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/ibd/what-is-IBD.htm>

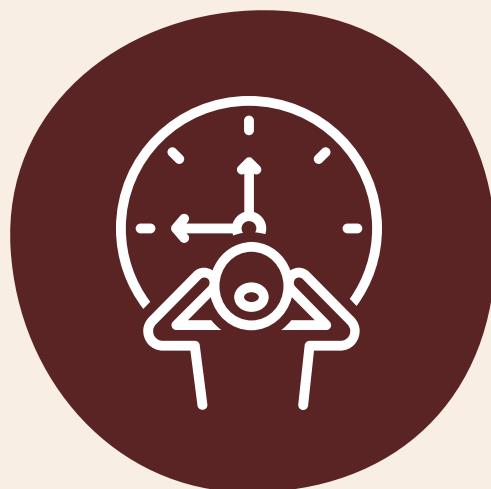
# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

*How IBD may Affect Your Student in the Classroom*



## Frequent Bathroom Breaks

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



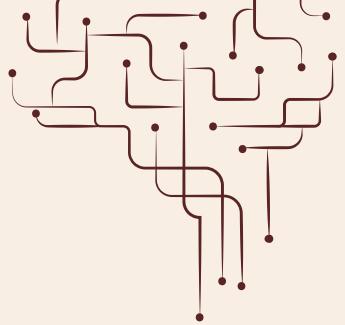
## Inability to attend class

**Inability to turn in  
assignments on time**

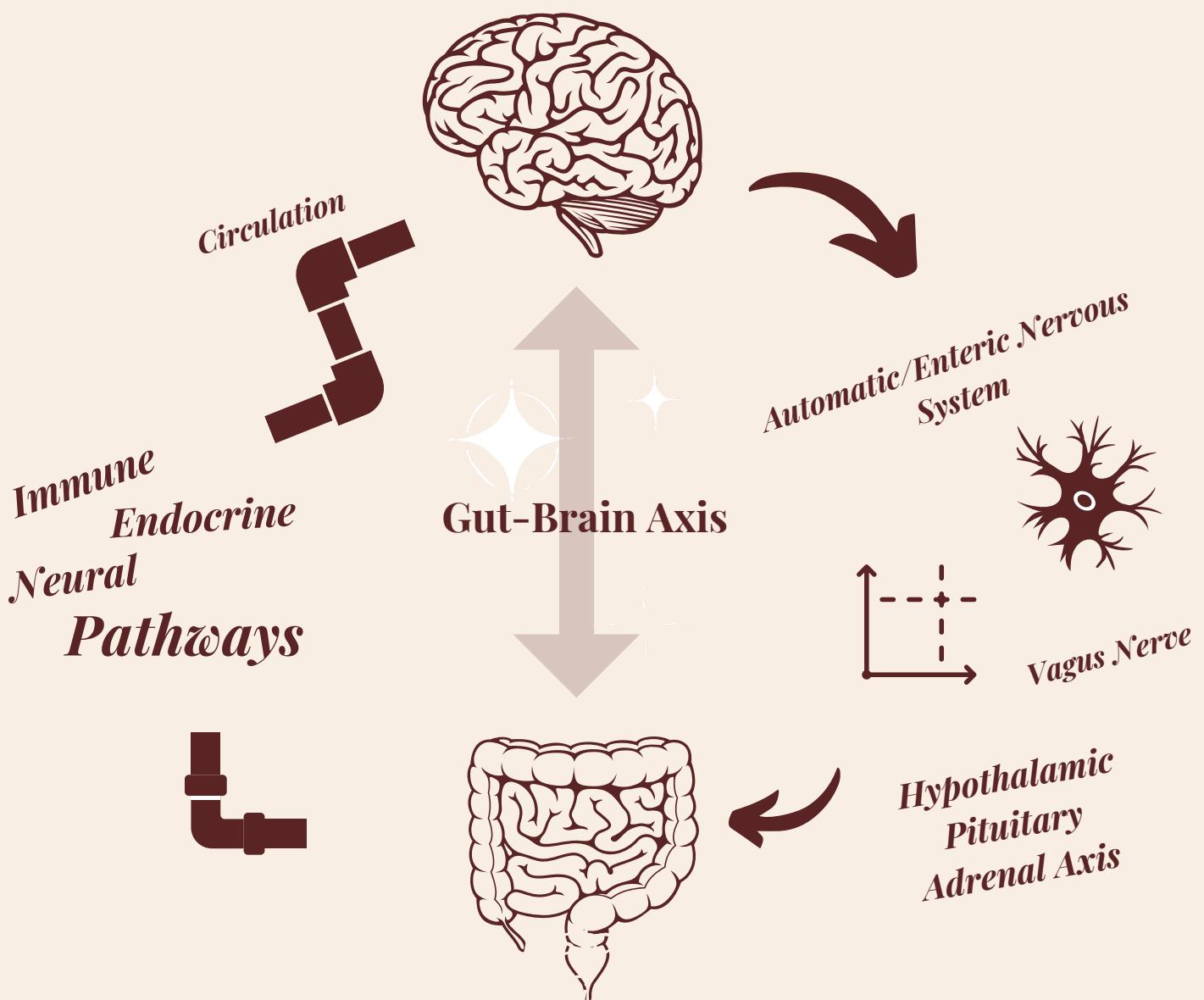
# IBD & Mental Health

"The **gut-brain-microbiota axis** is defined as a two-way communication system that allows intestinal microbes to communicate with the brain and vice versa. This system, which has not been entirely explored, is based on neural, endocrine, immunological and metabolic pathways"

IBD and mental health are inextricably linked. The majority of young people diagnosed with a chronic illness struggle with depression or anxiety. 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 a mood disorder and/or mental health illness.

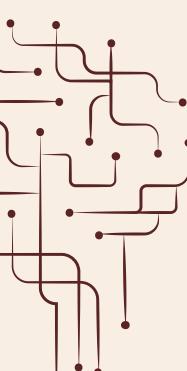


# Mind-Gut Connection



*This simplified diagram illustrates the systems thought to be involved in the mind-gut connection. The most important takeaway is that IBD is not confined to a physical disability; it almost always results in long-term mental health effects that create an additional barrier for students trying to succeed in a college setting.*

For more information on the ways in which disease in the gut affects mental health, please explore the following source and cited sources within: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7103973/>



# What Now?

Finally! If you have read through this far, we appreciate the time you have taken to understand the additional challenges your student goes through.

**You may be asking... how can I help my student? Here's how:**

Your student may have accommodations from the university's disability services office that outline what they have deemed appropriate. The first thing you can do to help your student reach their full academic potential 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 do without invisible barriers.

The next best thing you can do for this student is to **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 make 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 forgiveness, but 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, which makes it necessary to make appropriate accommodations for students specifically with IBD. In these cases, **you have the power and control to determine whether or not your class will be a disaster or exceptional for your student**.

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. It is difficult to express how invaluable it is. At the end of the day, we're all just here to learn.

Sincerely,  
Emma Adelstein & Avani Kabra  
Co-Founders IBD University Inc.

\*If you have any follow up questions or concerns, please email us at [admin@ibduniversity.org](mailto:admin@ibduniversity.org) and we are happy to discuss them.