

## TEACHING STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

The following are brief descriptions of some of the more common handicapping conditions. They are intended solely as a general overview. The functional abilities of individual students will be greatly influenced by the extent of involvement. If you desire additional information about a disability for a particular student, please contact the Disabled Student Programs & Services.

**CEREBRAL PALSY:** CP is a neuromuscular condition caused by brain damage before, during, or after birth. The damage may be a result of birth trauma, lack of oxygen, tumor, or other brain injury. CP affects coordination of muscle control, with the type and severity of the problem dependent on the location and extent of the brain damage. It is not a progressive disorder.

### SOME COMMON LIMITATIONS:

1. A student with CP may have some degree of difficulty when speaking. If you are not sure what a student has said, repeat it back to the student for confirmation.
2. Sensory, perceptual and motor deficits may sometime affect CP individuals and add to learning problems.
3. Some students with CP may write slowly and lack precision in movements. They need to tape record lectures or use note-takers, and require assistance in taking exams.

**EPILEPSY:** This is not a specific disease. Rather, it is symptomatic of some abnormality of the brain. Seizures are characterized by convulsions of the body's muscles, partial or total loss of consciousness, mental confusion or disturbances of bodily functions that are usually controlled automatically by the brain and nervous system. If a seizure occurs, please contact security. A student that has a seizure will have mental confusion for a couple days post seizure and not be able to attend class.

**TRAUMATIC SPINAL CORD INJURY:** Spinal cord injuries may result from traumatic incidents such as auto accidents, sports injuries, falls, injuries from war, and birth injuries. Fracture or dislocation of the vertebrae may cause irreparable damage to the cord that relays messages from the brain

### SOME COMMON LIMITATIONS:

1. The student may have paralysis and loss of sensation below the point of injury.
2. Absence from school may result from urinary tract infections, respiratory problems and tissue breakdown ("bed sores") caused by constant pressure and poor circulation.

3. The physical abilities of a person with a spinal cord injury depend on the location and extent of the break in the spinal cord.

**RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS:** This inflammation of the joints is now believed to be caused by an immunological attack against normal body materials. When there is pain in moving a limb because of joint inflammation, the arthritic will keep this involved, joint in a fixed position. He may lose his range of motion and eventually be unable to straighten the joint.

**SOME COMMON LIMITATIONS:**

1. Some students must endure periodic pain, stiffness, and fever and tend to be depressed, introverted and/or moody.
2. Students who take large dosages of aspirin for pain relief may have a high tone hearing loss. This hearing loss disappears when the aspirin treatment is reduced.
3. Students may be bedridden for short periods as a result of arthritic "flare-up".

**MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS:** Little is known about the cause of this disorder. The disease attacks the myelin sheath surrounding the nerve fibers of the spinal cord and brain tissues. While MS is a progressive disease, it will often be characterized by periods of recovery. The symptoms include tremors of the limbs, particularly when the person tries to control his movements, slow and deliberate speech, and ocular abnormalities (nystagmus or involuntary eye movements).

**SOME COMMON LIMITATIONS:**

1. The student's physical condition may vary greatly.
2. The student may require the services of note-takers, readers and/or examination assistance.
3. Vision may be impaired.
4. The student should avoid overwork and fatigue.

**MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY:** There are several different types of muscular dystrophy. However, all are characterized by a gradual degeneration of muscles. In the later stages, there is a replacement of muscle tissue with fatty tissue. The most common form of MD (Duchene) is caused by a sex-linked recessive trait. Death usually occurs in late teens or early twenties as a result of heart or respiratory failure.

**SOME COMMON LIMITATIONS:**

1. The student will have difficulty in grasping heavy objects. Writing will probably be slow and laborious.
2. The student may require the services of note-takers.
3. Motivation is quite often a problem with older MD students.

**POST-POLIO:** Polio is an acute viral disease of the nervous system. The virus causes inflammation of the central nervous system. The primary area of attack is the spinal cord, nerve bundles attached to the cord, and areas of the brain surrounding the cord's upper end. The individual is left essentially paraplegic, but without the sensory involvements that occur in most cases of spinal cord injury.

**SOME COMMON LIMITATIONS:**

1. The student may have paralysis or non-functional use of his limbs.
2. Absence from school may result from respiratory or urinary tract infections.
3. Physical capabilities of the student will depend upon the extent of the damage caused by the virus.