

EXPLORING

chronic illness & ableism

IN COLLEGE



Muhlenberg College
Health & Counseling
Services

what is chronic illness, exactly?



ANY CONDITION THAT
REQUIRES REGULAR MEDICAL
ATTENTION AND/OR LIMITS
ASPECTS OF DAILY LIVING

OFTEN INVOLVES ONGOING
& FLUCTUATING PAIN &
DISCOMFORT

chronic conditions include



but are NOT (!) limited to:

ASTHMA

CROHN'S DISEASE

IBS/IBD

DIABETES

EPILEPSY

CYSTIC FIBROSIS

AUTOIMMUNE CONDITIONS

CHRONIC MOOD DISORDERS

LYME DISEASE

KIDNEY DISEASE

FIBROMYALGIA/CFS

ENDOMETRIOSIS

PCOS

CHRONIC MIGRAINES

20% of US college-
aged youth have a
chronic medical
condition,



but there is very little research on how to
support these individuals - a scarcity that
reflects **ableist attitudes** in both society and
academia.



ableism



is the **systemic** exclusion and oppression of those with disabilities – **visible AND invisible.**

Many chronic illnesses are often – if not always – hard or impossible to notice just by looking at someone. These are **invisible disabilities.**

When we uphold ableist ideas and practices, we exclude the **20%** of our fellow students with invisible a/o chronic conditions.

This has a REAL IMPACT.

College students with chronic conditions report **more social isolation, depression, and shame** than their classmates.

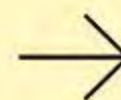
what can we do?

Keep following us this week to learn more about the impact of chronic illnesses on mental health - and about how to support each other in ways that are

inclusive

&

just!



EXAMPLES OF

interpersonal ableism

ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES



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using a limited resource –
such as a handicapped stall,
a parking spot, or a special
permission – when you do
not need to do so



assuming a person "can't" or
"won't want to" do something,
so deciding not to include
them

hosting a virtual meeting
or event **that isn't**
accessible to all

for example:
requiring cameras on
sharing media w/o captions or
descriptions
not taking breaks
not monitoring the chat box





questioning – in public or private – the legitimacy or need for someone's accommodations

consistently making plans
that disregard the needs of a
group member with a
chronic illness



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THE IMPACT OF

chronic illness
on
mental health

IN COLLEGE

**chronic conditions &
mental illness are often
co-occurring.**

The increased stress associated with navigating

- an ableist society,
- a complicated healthcare system,

and

- fluctuating symptoms

can increase the risk of developing various mental health conditions.

DEPRESSION

1/3 of individuals with chronic conditions also deal with depression

The unique difficulties of living with a chronic condition - like mobility, eating, or stamina challenges - **can lead to isolation and social stigma**, contributing to depressive symptoms

Symptoms can also overlap with the symptoms of an illness (like exhaustion or sleeping/eating issues), so signs of depression are **often overlooked**

PTSD

Up to 25% of those with ongoing illnesses develop PTSD

Illness-induced PTSD occurs after traumatic interactions with the healthcare system, **or** as a result of a constant barrage of upsetting symptoms.

Students with illness-induced PTSD might experience sleep issues, trouble concentrating, & **hypervigilance**

The body's response to trauma results in **increased inflammation**, which can worsen chronic symptoms



SOURCE: WALZ & BLEUER, 2014; EDMONDSON, 2014

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

Chronic illnesses of all kinds **frequently co-occur** with substance use disorders

The many stressors of coping with chronic illness - **on top of the responsibilities of college-level studies, work, and research** - can lead students to manage **both physical and mental distress** with substances

Both PTSD and depression increase a student's risk of developing a substance use disorder

resources

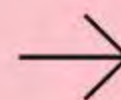
SAMHSA 24/7 National Hotline
1-800-662-HELP

AA of the Lehigh Valley 24/7 Hotline
610-882-0558

or contact

Muhlenberg College Counseling Services
for guidance & support





let's nurture a
campus community
that
includes and upholds
students with
chronic illness

The conditions of an ableist society

like

rigid, unrealistic expectations for productivity

or

**narrow definitions of disability that
exclude invisible illnesses**

or

the kinds of contributions we value

exclude many, and put us **all** at more
risk of developing certain mental and
physical conditions.

so how can we help each other?

When creating a program, performance, student teaching lesson, research project, or presentation, **plan for:**

Multiple means of representation

how will others be able to learn from you?

Multiple means of expression

how will others communicate with you?

Multiple means of engagement

how will you engage fellow students?

Name ableist attitudes,
values, and standards

Look out for and **reflect on** ableism happening
around you

Speak up when you notice or hear about
assumptions or judgment that could be
exclusionary to some

Advocate for those who might benefit from
additional support and share the (sometimes
intimidating!) responsibility of asking for help

Directly support those around you

- DO** regularly check in on your friends or classmates with chronic conditions
- DO** include everyone when making plans
- DON'T** make assumptions about someone's health or abilities based on what you can see
- DON'T** minimize or give unsolicited advice
- DO** offer help when appropriate and respect the response you get

Help to further normalize
rest, self-care, and community care

Take breaks

from everything! Allow your mind and body time to recharge and recover from activity and effort

Check in with your body

Try a compassionate body scan, progressive muscle relaxation, or low-impact, enjoyable exercise

Gently examine expectations you hold for yourself and others and consider adjusting them

When you're able, offer support to others!