

# Overview - Cystic fibrosis

People with cystic fibrosis experience a build-up of thick sticky mucus in the lungs, digestive system and other organs, causing a wide range of challenging symptoms affecting the entire body. They have difficulty putting on weight and are prone to recurrent chest infections, wheeziness, diarrhoea, jaundice and diabetes.

Cystic fibrosis is a variable condition affecting different individuals to differing degrees, and also a fluctuating condition – individuals can move from periods of good to poor health.

## **Students with cystic fibrosis may experience the following issues:**

- Fluctuating health, which may require hospitalisation.
- A need to schedule time daily for intensive self-treatment: physiotherapy, enzyme supplements and other medication.
- Difficulty maintaining attendance and punctuality at academic sessions because of periods of ill-health.
- Difficulty moving from one course venue to another if insufficient time between sessions.
- Fatigue.
- A persistent cough which is not an infection risk but which may cause the student embarrassment.
- A need to avoid contact with other people at the university who have cystic fibrosis since they are particularly susceptible to infections carried by others with cystic fibrosis.



## Top tips for teaching students with cystic fibrosis:

- Be open to the student talking about her/his health experiences and ask the student what would be helpful.
- Be flexible about attendance and participation.
- Be prepared to excuse the student from non-essential taught sessions to lighten her/his workload.
- Make adjustments as needed to support the student in physically-demanding tasks.
- Stagger assignment deadlines to avoid assignment overload.
- Communicate any changes to the academic timetable as early as possible.
- Be ready to provide tutorials to compensate for missed taught sessions.
- Be aware this is a hidden condition; the student may look well but be in significant discomfort.

### Useful links

- <https://www.cysticfibrosis.org.uk/life-with-cystic-fibrosis/higher-education>
- <https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/cystic-fibrosis/treatment>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVpY9ikrXzM>

