

Overview - Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) is an umbrella term for disorders which involve chronic inflammation of the digestive tract. Types of IBD include Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis.

These are chronic, variable conditions – people can have symptom-free periods, then flare-ups. Symptoms usually develop gradually but can occur without warning. Treatment is by medication (such as immune-suppressants) to ease symptoms and reduce the likelihood of flare-ups. Mild to moderate flare-ups can be self-managed but severe flare-ups of ulcerative colitis may require hospital treatment.

Symptoms are often worse first thing in the morning and include abdominal pain, diarrhoea, fever and fatigue (from anaemia or lack of sleep).

Students with IBD may experience the following issues:

- Last-minute difficulties attending scheduled meetings or teaching sessions.
- A need for frequent toilet breaks.
- A need to move around to ease abdominal pain.
- Problems concentrating/contributing in taught sessions because of tiredness/discomfort.
- Difficulties meeting assignment deadlines.



Top tips for teaching students with IBD:

- As this is a variable condition, be flexible about attendance to allow for flare-ups and medical appointments.
- Offer one-to-one tutorials in the afternoon rather than the morning to allow the student to catch up on sleep.
- If the student is not participating actively in taught sessions, be aware that this could be due to physical discomfort.
- Be mindful that stress can trigger a flare-up, so encourage students to pace themselves and have realistic expectations of achievement.
- Be sensitive to the student's need for toilet and comfort breaks, including the need to stand and move around.
- Allow the student to eat or take medication to manage their condition in taught sessions.
- Support requests for adjusted deadlines where flare-ups prevent the student from meeting an assignment deadline.
- Liaise with the student and Accessibility in advance of field trips and placements to ensure the student has access to toilet breaks en route, as well as ensuite accommodation and nearby laundry facilities on site.

Useful links

- <https://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/about-inflammatory-bowel-disease/publications/students-with-ibd-a-guide-for-universities-colleges>
- <http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/Publications/students-with-IBD-universities-colleges.pdf>

