

Preparing for college when you have a chronic condition or disability

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Preparing to go off to college can be challenging for anyone, but for some, these preparations are especially important. One Baylor College of Medicine expert explains how those with a chronic illness or disability

can best prepare for college.

"First and foremost, before you do anything else, you need to know how to advocate for yourself and be able to take care of your condition," said Dr. Cynthia Peacock, associate professor of medicine and director of the Transition Medicine Clinic at Baylor.

If somebody has a disability or a chronic condition, Peacock said they should always visit and tour the colleges that they have in mind. There are many important questions individuals with a disability or a [chronic condition](#) should ask before settling on a college, she said. Some of these include:

- If you are in a wheelchair, are there accessible entrances?
- Do you have a long way to go to get to another class?
- Does the college offer some kind of transportation for you?
- When looking at dorms, are you going to be sharing a bathroom?
If so, with how many people?
- If you are in a wheelchair, is the bathroom stall handicap accessible?
- Does the cafeteria have the food that you need?
- Is there a pharmacy near campus so you can get any medications you may need?
- If you are going away for school, does your insurance work out of your home state?
- If you see a doctor out-of-state, what are your pharmacy benefits?
- If a medication is prescribed and it is out of network, do you pay for it?

She also recommends stopping by the campus' disability resource center. It is important to know how the center can help you and what documents may be required.

"While colleges have to provide accommodations for you, you have to seek them out. You have to be able to go to the disability resource center and let the staff know what you need," Peacock said.

Once you decide on a college, Peacock said you should find a local specialist that can help manage your condition. She recommends that you make an appointment with the specialist right away, even if you are not sick, so they can establish how best to care for the condition while you are at school. She also suggests that you bring a medical summary to both your specialist and the campus health clinic so that it is on file and they know about your medical history.

She added that it is important for you to know how to disclose that you have a [chronic illness](#) or disability to the people that may need to know, such as your roommate or resident assistant.

Peacock emphasized that the earlier you disclose your condition, the better off you will be. This will help bring advocates for your well-being to your side sooner and it will help people around you better understand your circumstances.

"Overall, competency equals confidence, which equals better coping. Going off to [college](#) is a big change and you have to get ready for it," Peacock said.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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