

What are respiratory diseases and disorders?

Respiratory diseases and disorders are characterised by episodes of shortness of breath and difficulty in breathing. Many students may experience chronic breathing problems as a result of diagnosis ranging from asthma and recurring bronchitis to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Episodes may be triggered by a range of factors including weather factors (humidity, temperature), stress, physical exertion and environmental irritants (chemicals, pollen). Frequent lateness or absence from lectures may result. High doses of oral steroids used to control symptoms can impair memory and recall. Fatigue and difficulty climbing stairs may also be major problems, depending on the severity of the attacks.

Academic difficulties

- Compulsory attendance at lectures and tutorials
- Compulsory attendance and participation in field trips
- Claustrophobia in some areas

Strategies to assist the student

Lectures

- A student who has severe or chronic breathing problems may often be late when arriving from another class, especially if the previous class is the other side of the campus. Be flexible with arrival times and allow the student a few minutes to "catch their breath" on arrival
- Be flexible when a student is having a shortness of breath attack - they may need to frequently leave the room and may (as a result of high-dose steroids) be fidgety in the lecture room
- Accept that students may miss lectures because of periods of hospitalisations or treatments/clinics related to their condition. Encourage them to get copies of the material from either yourself or other students

Tutorials, Laboratories and Field Trips

- Accept that students may miss tutorials and field trips because of their heightened sensitivity to the environment or hospitalisations/treatment times related to their condition. Encourage them to get copies of the material from either yourself or other students
- Some students may experience claustrophobia in small tutorial rooms, especially if there are no external windows. If necessary relocate the tutorial to a well ventilated room or a room with external windows
- Some students may not be able to keep up on field trips or outings that require a high level of walking around. Plan ahead to slow down the pace of the trip and allow for frequent rest breaks

Assignments and Assessments

- Be flexible with deadlines and extensions
- Consider negotiating an individual learning programme for students with a respiratory disease or disorder. This can include flexible deadlines for assignments to take into account the effects of their disability
- Encourage students with respiratory disease or disorder to apply for alternative assessment arrangements (a quiet room with good ventilation and a supervisor)