

# **Off to College...**

**A Guide for Young  
Adults with Chronic  
Illness Transitioning  
to College Life**



## **Off to College: A Guide for Young Adults with Chronic**

**Illness** is a resource guide filled with information from college selection considerations to transitioning to living on a college campus.

College planning can be difficult to navigate and know what questions to ask. Special considerations might be needed for a young adult with a chronic illness. This guide is meant to provide information helpful to both students and parents embarking on this new journey.

Congratulations on your high school accomplishments and good luck with college. Relax, learn, and enjoy the journey!

### *Author*

MARY ARBUCKLE, MSW  
Pediatric Pulmonary Center Social Work Trainee  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
*Created July 2012, Updated January 2016*

### *Inspired By*

OFF TO COLLEGE RECOMMENDATIONS  
Pediatric Pulmonary Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison

### *Sponsor*



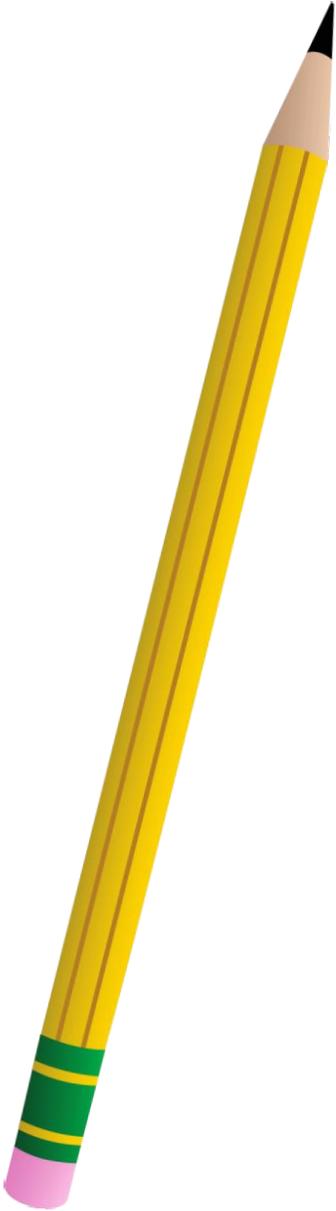
PEDIATRIC PULMONARY CENTER  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
<http://www.uwppc.org/>



This publication was supported in part by funding from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, through grant number T72 MC 00008, the University of Wisconsin Pediatric Pulmonary Center.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>College Selection. . . . .</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Academic Accommodations. . . . .</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Student Housing. . . . .</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Healthcare &amp; Medications. . . . .</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Peer Support. . . . .</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Financial Assistance. . . . .</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Insurance. . . . .</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Resources. . . . .</b>	<b>10</b>



# COLLEGE SELECTION

Choosing a college is a tough decision! There are a lot of colleges and universities to choose from and many different factors to consider. Each college has something different to offer every student.

Check out the college's online website, take a tour of campus, and talk with current students and alumni. Remember, everyone has an opinion on your college selection but the final choice is up to you!

## **When exploring colleges, consider the following:**

- What are the admission guidelines and requirements? Do you qualify for acceptance?
- Does the college offer majors or programs you are interested in?
- How close is the college to home? Too close or too far for visits?
- What extracurricular activities, clubs, and student interest groups are offered?
- Do you like the campus layout? Is it easy for you to navigate?
  - Take a look at the campus map and make sure to go on a campus tour.
  - What is the available transportation? Is student parking available, are there campus buses, is it wheelchair accessible?

**Dealing with Different** list of 20 best colleges for students with physical disabilities

<http://dealingwithdifferent.com/disability-friendly-colleges/>

# ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Every college has an office of disability services for students. They provide services for students with a wide range of needs from physical disabilities, learning disabilities, chronic illness, and mental health conditions. This office is here for you- their job is to help you balance your health and academics by providing student specific support and accommodations.

You might never need their services but in an event of an illness, health crisis, or hospitalization they can help you contact your professors and arrange a plan to keep up with your studies.

## **After you have been accepted to a college, contact the office of disability:**

- Stop by their office during your student orientation and talk with an accommodations specialist.
- Register as a student with a disability to be eligible for services. You may need to provide special documentation from your health care provider.
- They may allow you to register for classes early to ensure you have the most flexible schedule to accommodate your treatments, accessibility needs, or other special considerations.
- They can provide recommendations on your course load and refer you to academic advising.

**OCR: Office for Civil Rights** is a resource for college students with disabilities and provides information on the rights for academic accommodations.

**<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html>**

# STUDENT HOUSING

Moving away from home is a big step for both you and your parents. It's one of the first tastes of independence in adult life. Choosing the right housing is important to ensure your academic success at college. Talk with your college's housing assignments coordinator about your special needs and options available to you.

## Housing Considerations:

- Live on campus, off campus, or commute from home: *What will best support your academic success?*
- Private room vs. shared room: *Consider your health care needs and treatment schedules.*
- Air conditioning: *Some dorms have central air; others have window units by request. Make sure to check in advance.*
- Mini fridge to store medications: *Check if provided in room.*
- Microwave to sterilize equipment: *Check if provided in room.*
- Ample space to store medications, equipment, and supplies.
- Special electricity requirements for medical equipment.

## Don't forget to pack:

- Medications
- Special medical equipment
- Special dietary/nutritional supplements
- Insurance card
- Immunization records
- Contact information for primary health care providers
- Contact information for school clinic and local emergency care center



# HEALTHCARE & MEDICATIONS

In order to have academic success, you must also maintain your health and manage your chronic illness. Finding a balance between your academics, social life, and health is an important lesson in the transition to college life.

## **Tips for Health Success:**

- See your current care team one month before school starts to review your current health status, intervention plan, and make sure prescriptions are up to date.
- Make sure you pack your medications and have access to pharmacy refills. Identify a pharmacy near campus that can fill your medications and provide supplies or consider receiving your medications by a mail-order pharmacy.
- Create a summary of your medications, allergies, medical conditions, surgeries, and medical providers to keep in your backpack in case of emergency.
- Visit the student health clinic and learn what services they provide. Make sure they are knowledgeable to provide the care you need. Also, find a care center that can provide emergency care in the area. Check with your insurance company for network coverage.
- Keep the phone number of your specialty care center with you in case you have questions or concerns. Feel free to call them with questions.
- Schedule clinic visits with your specialty care providers during school breaks or days off from class. Make sure to keep up with your appointments!

# PEER SUPPORT

Living away from home can be hard. However, college can soon become your home away from home. Part of the college experience is meeting new people, trying new things, and finding out who you are.

## **Having the support of college friends can help you with the transition process and in managing your health.**

- Think about who needs to know you have a chronic illness to help if you become ill.
  - We highly recommend students share this information with their resident advisor, student health services, the office of disability services, and a friend or roommate to help you in an emergency.
- Build a support network: create your home away from home.
  - Participate in dorm-sponsored activities, join a student interest group, or find a job or volunteer opportunity. These are all great ways to meet other students and stay connected on campus.
- Connect in person or online with other students with disabilities for support and to share challenges, triumphs, and advice.



**We Connect Now** is a website dedicated to uniting college students with disabilities in access to higher education and employment issues.  
<http://weconnectnow.wordpress.com>

# FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

College is expensive but can be one of the best investments you can make. There are resources that can help reduce the cost of college but require ambition on your part to complete the necessary applications on time. Start your scholarship search and financial aid application EARLY to be considered for the most opportunities!



- Contact your high school guidance counselor for locally available scholarships and grants.
- Ask your health care social worker about condition-based scholarships available for patients at your care center.
- Make an appointment with your college's office of financial aid. They have the most up to date information on completing the application for Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), tuition costs, and available grants and scholarships.

## **Check out these resources for more information and available scholarships:**

**FAFSA** is the website to complete a free application for Federal Student Aid.

**<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>**

**FinAid** is a website with information regarding financial aid and scholarships for students with disabilities.

**<http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/disabled.phtml>**

**BestColleges.com** hosts a list of scholarships and financial aid opportunities for students with disabilities and chronic health conditions.

**<http://www.bestcolleges.com/financial-aid/disabled-students/#chronic>**

# INSURANCE

Continuous health insurance and prescription medication coverage is important to maintaining your health and having access to medical care. Talk with your parents and your health care team about your current coverage and plans for future coverage since plans and options vary greatly.

## **Here are some options:**

### **1. Stay on your parents' policy until age 26.**

Under the Affordable Care Act, children can stay covered under their parent's insurance until the age of 26, regardless of college attendance.

### **2. Does your college offer student health insurance?**

Call the student health clinic to inquire about plans and eligibility. These plans are normally offered at a lower cost than private health insurance.

### **3. Do you have a job that offers health insurance?**

Employer plans are usually offered at lower premiums than the private market. If you have a job, check if you qualify for insurance. If you are job searching, consider the importance of benefits in your search.

### **4. Do you qualify for a state health insurance plan for low-income individuals?**

Some states offer health insurance plans for single adults, without dependent children, who are considered low income. These plans offer wide coverage for no cost or very little premiums. Explore your state government's website for more information.

### **5. Buy insurance through the online Health Insurance Marketplace at [healthcare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov).**

If your individual income is 400% or less than the federal poverty level (FPL), you may get tax credits to reduce the cost. With income less than 250% of FPL, you may also get help paying for other out-of-pocket costs.

## **If attending college out of state:**

- Check with your health insurance company regarding Out-of-Network Coverage.

# RESOURCES

**BestColleges.com** hosts a list of scholarships and financial aid opportunities for students with disabilities and chronic health conditions.

<http://www.bestcolleges.com/financial-aid/disabled-students/#chronic>

**Dealing with Different** list of 20 best colleges for students with physical disabilities

<http://dealingwithdifferent.com/disability-friendly-colleges/>

**FAFSA** is the website to complete a free application for Federal Student Aid.

<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>

**FinAid** is a website with information and regarding financial aid and scholarships for students with disabilities.

<http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/disabled.phtml>

**Got Transition?** is the National Health Care Transition Center that aims to support optimal transitions from pediatric to adult models of health care for youth with and without special health care needs.



<http://www.gottransition.org>

**OCR: Office for Civil Rights** is a resource for college students with disabilities and information on their rights for academic accommodations.

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html>

**We Connect Now** is a website dedicated to uniting college students with disabilities in access to higher education and employment issues.



<http://weconnectnow.wordpress.com>

## **Acknowledgements**

Special thank you to the young adults I have had the pleasure to assist during their college transition. Thank you for sharing your journey, advice, challenges, and successes.

Sincere thank you to my mentors, colleagues, and fellow Maternal & Child Health Bureau trainees for their support and shared knowledge.