



Top Tips for Studying with an Energy-Limiting Long-Term Condition

Studying, completing coursework and meeting multiple deadlines are just some of the challenges involved in attending college or university. This can be a stressful time for anyone but is made even more difficult for someone living with an energy-limiting, long-term condition. These symptoms can include fatigue, 'brain-fog' and persistent pain which may affect our ability to study but can also prevent us from engaging in the other opportunities that college/university has to offer.

We have put together this document to provide you with guidance and strategies that may help you to navigate the world of study and to help you live a fuller life despite the symptoms that you may be experiencing.

Applying to college/university

- When applying for college or university, it's important that you communicate your needs so that appropriate support and reasonable adjustments can be put in place before you commence your course.
- If possible, speak to support staff at the college/university to check your needs can be accommodated. Colleges and universities usually have support or disability services that exist to support people with physical and mental health needs.
- Reasonable adjustments are changes put in place to support people with a health condition to engage in their studies. These are specific to the individual but may include additional time to submit coursework, breaks during exams, assistive technology (laptops, dictation software) or extra learning support.
- You may be entitled to Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) which can be used to fund the adjustments or equipment that you may require – these are non-means tested grants.
- If the nature of your condition is unpredictable and you require lots of flexibility, consider online learning options such as The Open University.

Finding accommodation

- Moving away from home to attend college/university can be a stressful experience, and it's important to find accommodation that is accessible and works for you.
- If you have mobility difficulties or experience fatigue, consider the accessibility of the accommodation you're staying in – can you be located on the ground floor? Is there access to a lift? How far is your accommodation from your campus and local amenities (supermarket, pharmacy etc.)?



- Some university residences offer catered meal options which might help you manage your energy levels and to maintain an adequate food and fluid intake.
- If you have been allocated accommodation and you do not feel this meets your health needs, get in touch with your college/university as soon as possible to discuss alternative options that are available.

Transport and Getting Around

- If you're moving away to attend college or university, consider planning your route in advance so you are aware of the distances you may need to travel on foot, car or by public transport. It's important to factor this into the energy you have available and can help reduce fatigue from long or energy-draining commutes.
- If you find busy environments energy-draining and/or over-stimulating, it could be helpful to travel during quieter times of the day.
- If you are grading your walking distance to increase your stamina and endurance, incorporate this into your commute i.e. get off the bus a stop early, leave the car further away from your destination.
- If your health condition limits your ability walk or access public transport, speak to student support services as they may be able to support you to apply for Disabled Students Allowance which may help fund use of a taxi.
- Discuss with your college/university opportunities to engage in hybrid or remote working. You may be able to study from home which could allow you to conserve energy and help you focus on your learning.
- Consider using the lift rather than the stairs if this is something likely to drain your battery.



Shopping and Meals

- Maintaining adequate food and fluid intake is important to fuel your mind and body and can help to manage your energy levels.
- Try to make time to prioritise eating and drinking regularly and consider ways that you could conserve energy when preparing meals. Some people find batch cooking helpful as this allows you to freeze multiple portions which can be easily reheated at the end of a busy day.
- If you struggle with fatigue in the morning, consider making your breakfast the night before – 'overnight oats' and other similar recipes can be helpful and nutritious options.
- Try to keep a stock of dry foods and tins in the cupboard with long use-by dates. These could be used if you're feeling particularly unwell and are unable to get to the shops.
- If getting to the shops can be a challenge, consider buying shopping online and getting this delivered to you.

Dealing with 'brain-fog'

- 'Brain fog' describes a collection of symptoms related to our mental processes. This can include difficulty taking on new information, recalling memories and word-finding difficulties which could significantly affect your ability to study. It may be helpful to consider your preferred learning style or ask for copies of any presentations/slides after lectures to remind you of any lessons or seminars.
- Some people find using prompts, Post-it notes and reminders helpful in order to jog their memory.
- Managing your overall energy levels is really important as 'brain-fog' is closely linked to fatigue. If you are feeling tired or your battery is low on energy, your experience of 'brain-fog' is likely to feel worse. Managing your energy levels using the 4 P's (prioritising, pacing, permission and planning) may help to reduce fatigue and lessen symptoms of 'brain-fog'.
- Try to avoid multi-tasking when studying. Multi-tasking can quickly drain our energy levels which can worsen 'brain-fog'. Avoid distractions and try to focus on one task at a time. Some people find having calming music or the radio on quietly can help with focus.

Managing your mental health

- Maintaining your psychological health is important when living with an energy-limiting long-term condition, and especially when studying at college or university. Establishing a healthy work-life balance can be helpful and making time to participate in hobbies, interests and activities that help you relax is important.
- Increasing our physical activity levels helps to release endorphins – 'feel good chemicals' which can give our mood a boost. Whilst this may be difficult with a long-term condition, consider movement which works for you i.e. light stretches or a gentle walk outside.
- When feeling low in mood, we sometimes avoid other people and become isolated which can further impact on how we are feeling. It's important to maintain contact with friends and family and if you feel comfortable, to share any concerns or worries. If this feels overwhelming, even sending a text or message could help you feel more connected.
- If you feel that your mental health is having a significant impact on your wellbeing and ability to study, seek help from your college or university's wellbeing service. You may be able to access talking therapies, counselling and reasonable adjustments that could help you prioritise your wellbeing.



Managing busy environments

- Some people living with energy-limiting long-term conditions can be over-sensitive to sound, light, touch, taste or smell. This can make it difficult for people to manage in busy environments and be very energy-draining.
- Find out if your college or university has access to a safe space or sensory room which is less stimulating. You may be able to use this space during your day when feeling overwhelmed and this could be a reasonable adjustment built into your support plan.
- If you struggle with bright lights, consider purchasing dark tinted glasses to filter out harsh light. Some people who have difficulties with loud environments may also benefit from noise-filtering earplugs which can reduce background noise without blocking sound.

Meeting new people

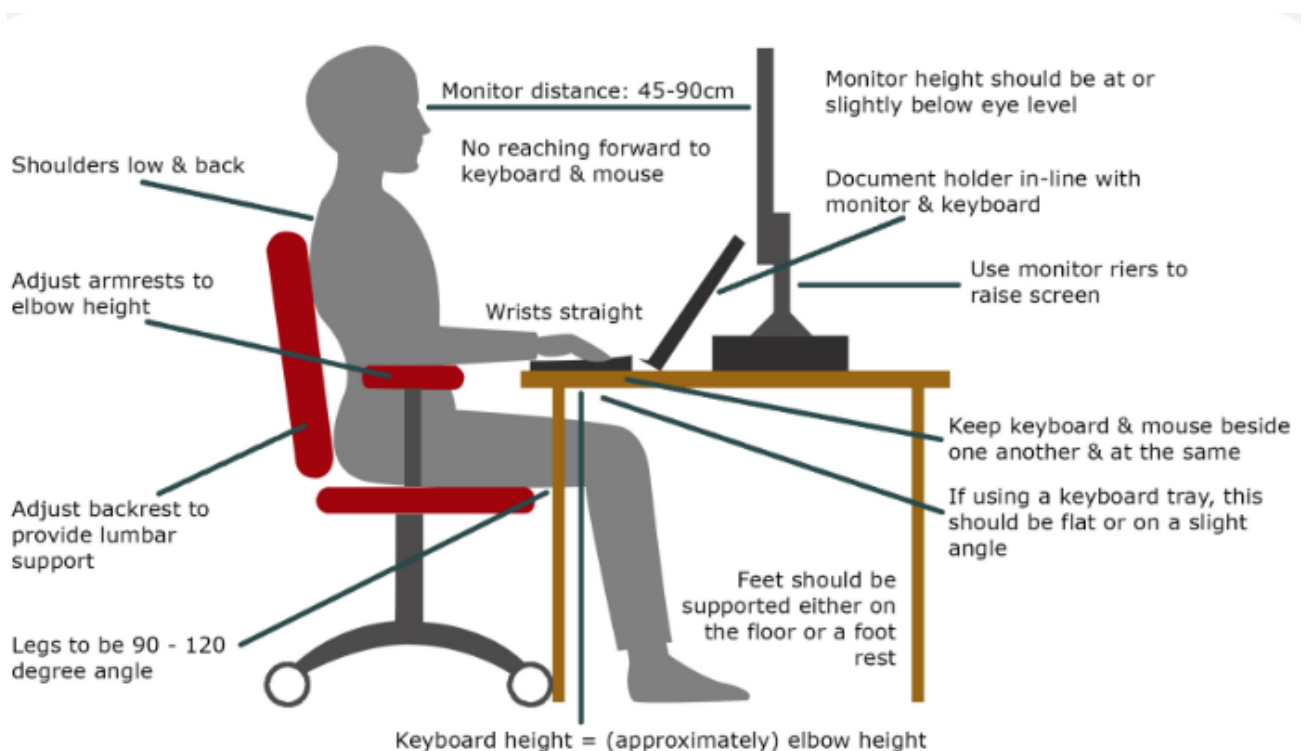
- Getting out and meeting new people is a natural part of going to college or university, and living with an energy-limiting long-term condition shouldn't stop you from doing this.
- Joining social groups, clubs and societies are great ways to meet new people and is an important way to relax and unwind when studying hard. Give yourself permission to have fun as this may boost your mood and wellbeing.
- If your energy levels make it difficult to join clubs or societies, consider if there is a different way to engage – can you join virtually rather than face-to-face? If your group meets up regularly (i.e. weekly) could you attend every other week instead?
- Many colleges and universities run 'buddy schemes', where you can be matched with someone who will be able to support you when you first go to college/university. They may be able to support you to attend events or meet new people if you feel you need some extra support.



Posture & working on the computer or at a desk

- Posture and how we position ourselves is really important when managing an energy limiting condition. If we adopt a poor posture such as being slumped over a desk or twisting in a chair, this can have a significant impact on symptoms including pain, fatigue and feeling breathless.
- If you are sitting at a desk, make sure that your work area is designed to provide you with good posture and comfort.
- If you spend a lot of time sitting when you are studying, try to make time for frequent breaks so that you can get up and move around. Light stretches can also be helpful to improve blood flow to the different muscles and joints in the body.

- You may be entitled to Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) that could go towards some of the equipment you might require. Please speak to your college or university's support services for additional advice.
- Good posture doesn't apply just to sitting – good standing posture is important too! If you have to carry heavy books or a laptop, make sure that you have a supportive rucksack and that this has been adjusted to provide you with enough support. Try to use both shoulder straps to distribute weight evenly. It might be helpful to consider if you can reduce the amount of weight you need to carry – could you access e-books instead of physical copies, could you use a trolley or roll-along bag? Do you have any friends or course mates that could carry some of the load for you?



(Images courtesy of Vecteezy.com)