

## Special Services

### Section 504

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a civil rights law that prevents discrimination against individuals with disabilities from **any institution that receives federal funds** from the US Department of Education. Some private schools that do not receive federal funding may be exempt from Section 504. According to the United States Department of Education, a student qualifies for Section 504 protection if he or she “has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.”

## Resources for the College and Student

### Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 “prohibits discrimination and ensures equal opportunity for persons with disabilities in employment, state and local government services, public accommodations, commercial facilities, and transportation.”

There are also standards for accessible design.

To learn more, visit [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov)

### US Department of Education

The US Department of Education has several resources for college students. The Civil Rights portion covers disability discrimination. There is also a section on the Higher Education Opportunity Act. This document covers several ways that an institution can better help people with disabilities. The website is a great source for any questions that you may have.

Visit [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) for more information

### RSDSA

The Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome Association is one of the leading CRPS/RSD foundations. RSDSA’s mission is to educate, support and provide hope for all of those affected by CRPS/RSD while continuing to be a driving force behind research. RSDSA has additional resources that can be made available upon request from the student or the institution.

To learn more, visit [www.rsds.org](http://www.rsds.org)

*“I’ve had professors refuse my accommodation plan. I’ve also had people not understand why I need accommodations since I ‘look fine.’”-  
Anonymous*

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# Accommodating Students with CRPS

**How you can effectively  
accommodate a student living  
with Complex Regional Pain  
Syndrome and help them work  
towards a brighter future.**

For people living with Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS), formerly known as Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy (RSD) getting to college is a major accomplishment. CRPS is the most painful condition in existence according to the McGill Pain Index. People with CRPS who are attending college will need the support of the college to help lead them to success. Understanding and empathy are needed to help a student with CRPS. Many people with CRPS have already faced obstacles in the medical world, as their pain is invisible.

Once someone is diagnosed with CRPS, they must adapt to the changes that their pain causes. They have to create a “new normal.” College requires even more adapting for these students. They want to be able to live a relatively normal life. College is a major part of this “normalcy,” but often, students do not get the proper accommodations and are unable to succeed. These students want the same educational opportunity as their peers.

Our goal is to help you understand what you can do to help students with CRPS succeed at your institution. Getting the proper support and accommodations can be crucial for these students. Your understanding will make all the difference for these students who want to better their futures and obtain a degree.



## CRPS 101

CRPS/RSD stands for Complex Regional Pain Syndrome/Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy. It is a chronic neuroinflammatory condition, which can become very debilitating. It is considered to be a rare disorder by the Federal Food and Drug Administration. The pain that people with CRPS live with is rated to be the worst pain on the McGill Pain Scale. The exact cause of CRPS is unknown, although there is often a trauma that triggers it (sprain, fracture, surgery). CRPS can spread throughout the body, not just the site of the trauma. While CRPS is not life-threatening, it is a life-changing event. Some of the symptoms include:

- 📖 Temperature change in the affected area
- 📖 Swelling and discoloration
- 📖 Allodynia (pain from stimuli that is not normally painful– the touch of fabric or the wind blowing)
- 📖 Burning/icy sensation
- 📖 Limited range of motion
- 📖 Flare-ups of pain (pain that is worse than their every day pain)



## Challenges for People with CRPS

Students with CRPS may face more difficulties than typical students. Some of the challenges they face include:

- 📖 CRPS symptoms may not be visible at all times, and may change daily, even hourly.
- 📖 Difficulty explaining condition to peers and staff/fear of isolation
- 📖 Overachiever behavior, which can lead to a stress-caused flare.
- 📖 CRPS pain is experienced 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- 📖 Brain fog (inability to think clearly due to pain)
- 📖 Difficulties in socializing
- 📖 Pain when sitting/standing for long periods of time
- 📖 Being away from home (and away from the caregivers/medical professionals they are used to) can be scary
- 📖 Encourage your student to be in constant contact with you.
- 📖 Trying to hold down a job while balancing class work

## Suggested Accommodations

Students with CRPS may be able to attend class as usual. However, in case of a severe pain flare up, or if the student is unable to attend class like their peers, an accommodation plan should be in place. These are examples of accommodations that may help:

- 📖 Flexible attendance policies for flare days, cold weather days, and doctors' appointments
- 📖 A seat in a part of the room where the student will not be bumped that is also away from anything that may cause excess noise/vibration
- 📖 Class on a first floor or in a building with an elevator
- 📖 Special notetaking devices (such as an iPad app, a speech to text software, recorded lectures, or a note taker) or professor-provided notes
- 📖 Alternate days/locations to take exams and/or turn in assignments
- 📖 Digital textbooks that can be brought to class
- 📖 Permission to leave early or arrive late depending on pain and weather
- 📖 An online instruction forum, such as Moodle, in case of prolonged absence
- 📖 Ability to move around if there is discomfort
- 📖 Flexible dress code (if applicable)
- 📖 If living in an on-campus residence hall, a room on the first floor by an exit
- 📖 Special transportation in case of pain flare
- 📖 Handicap parking space (if applicable)

- 📖 Hybrid or online classes
- 📖 Special times for dining hall or special location to get food/eat where the student may not get bumped

## Keys to Success

Helping a student with CRPS succeed may go beyond just one accommodation appointment. Here are some keys to success for helping a person with CRPS:

- 📖 Allow a meeting time for the student with each of the departments in the school (health services, admissions, student services, residence life, public safety, etc.). Include the head of the department of the student's major.
- 📖 This is a learning experience for the student and the school. It may take some trial and error. Keep the plan open.
- 📖 Making resources available and accessible to a student can make a difference.
- 📖 Students should be able to communicate with anyone whocould help them succeed. An open dialogue is important.
- 📖 Some people with CRPS don't like to discuss their syndrome(s) in front of others, but professors should be aware of what the student is experiencing to an extent.

*"I wish teachers [and professors] would understand sometimes, we can't make it to class. One of my teachers would take a letter 10 points off my final grade for each class I miss." - Mackenzie B.*