

Everyone has a right to receive reasonable adjustments in order to access education on the same basis. This applies to public and private institutions, primary and secondary schools, TAFE and universities. These rights are protected by federal legislation, meaning that they apply to all states and territories.

For those with a disability, education providers must:

- Consult with you and (if you wish) your parent, caregiver, guardian or another person close to you.
- Make reasonable accommodations or adjustments.
- Take action to prevent you being discriminated against or mistreated.

Adjustments should be made to facilitate: admission/enrolment, participation in the program and use of facilities and services.

Dysautonomia, including POTS, falls within the definition of 'disability' set out in legislation and those living with this condition have a right to request reasonable adjustments.

## Who should I talk to?

Reach out to your education provider to see who may be the best point of contact to arrange a meeting. You have a right to consultation, so you should not feel uncomfortable about asking to speak with someone. Many education providers have disability support services and officers. At schools, it may be the head of studies, principal or counsellor. It may also be useful to speak with your individual teachers, tutors or lecturers, so discuss with your provider the best way to have the key players involved and understanding of your needs.

## Do I need to prepare anything?

You do not need to bring anything as part of the consultation process, and you do not need a formal diagnosis. That's right - it does not matter that your POTS diagnosis is suspected, unconfirmed or you are awaiting further tests. If you are thought to live with a disability, you have a right to reasonable adjustments. Although it is not required, it is still useful if you are able to bring a letter from your doctor/s and/or your own notes. This can help your provider more easily understand your condition and the impacts it has on your ability to participate in study. You might want to even bring a copy of this factsheet.

## What reasonable adjustments can I ask for?

Whether an adjustment is reasonable depends on, and involves consideration of, a range of factors, including:

Does it balance the interests of all parties affected? What is the disability? What are the student's views on the effects of the adjustment to their ability to achieve learning outcomes, participate in a program and be independent? How will the adjustment affect the education provider, staff and other students? What are the costs of the adjustments and what would the benefits be?

Remember, what is considered a reasonable adjustment is a concept that will change over time. What is not reasonable or possible today, might be in the future as your education provider's resources and requirements change, as well as if your condition and symptoms change. Don't hesitate to ask for adjustments again at a later time as things might be different.

When you live with dysautonomia everyday, it can sometimes be difficult to think of what may assist you at school, TAFE or university. We've put together some suggestions over the page - you might like to bring this to your education provider to help work through ways to make suitable adjustments.

## Example Adjustments

The below outlines a range of example adjustments that may be useful to help with common dysautonomia symptoms. Whether these adjustments are reasonable will depend on your particular circumstances and provider.

- Having snacks, medication and a water bottle accessible in all classes and exams
- Being able to elevate your legs in class by having a footstool or spare chair kept at the back of each classroom or tucked under your desk
- Being placed in classes with a close friend that 'gets it' to help with sharing notes for missed classes and generally lending support
- Access to online classes or recorded lessons to minimise issues when classes are missed or when experiencing brain fog
- Special consideration for grades and extensions
- Adjustments to class requirements or assessment to complete subjects which may involve a lot of standing, such as Physical Education, Science or Hospitality
- Adjustments to Classroom allocation that considers physical requirements e.g. ground floor or elevator access, appropriate temperature control, centralised location for lockers or homerooms etc. Be provided with a second set of textbooks that can be kept on campus to reduce physical load and assist in managing fatigue or pain
- Adjustments to study load including undertaking study on a part-time basis or, for high school, completing Years 11 & 12 over three years or doing the minimum number of subjects
- Access to sick bay / on-campus nursing facilities to take breaks as needed, for example, if a class is running a silent study session, you might prefer to lay down in sick bay for that class
- Adjustments for exams including additional time, choosing the time of day, being permitted medication, snacks and drinks in the exam room, having a footstool to elevate legs, having a minimum number of days between exams
- Uniform adjustments, for example to allow leg compression stockings to be worn

Remember, these are just some examples! Dysautonomia can take many forms and involve many different symptoms, so make sure to request adjustments that will make a real difference for you.

## Further Resources

If you're looking for further information, we recommend starting with the Disability Standards for Education Guide available at:

<https://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005/students/english/explaining>

If you're interested in the legislation that underpins these rights, you can find them here:

Disability Discrimination Act (Cth) 1992

Disability Standards for Education (Cth) 2005

More information about advocating for your rights can be found at the Children and Young People with Disability Australia Organisation:  
<https://www.cyda.org.au/>

It's always a good idea to simply reach out to your education provider and see that support they can provide. If you're having difficulties, you can always talk to a health advocate, your doctor, allied health provider, a lawyer or your community legal centre.

Please note that this factsheet is intended to provide general information only. The Australian POTS Foundation and its affiliates do not provide legal advice and make no representations as to the applicability of this general information to specific individuals or their education providers. You should seek your own professional, independent legal advice. This information is current as of September 2023.