Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

A Guide for Adolescents and Young Adults (AYAs): Support for College and Graduate Students with Cancer

This information explains how you can get support as a college or graduate school student with cancer. It also lists support resources offered at MSK and other organizations.

Cancer can cause a wide range of physical, emotional, and mental side effects. Managing these side effects while you take classes, do assignments, and study for tests is not easy. Choosing to keep going to school or take time off is a personal decision. Talking with your care team about what to expect from your treatment can help you make your decision.

If you decide to continue with your studies, there are many services that can help you balance your treatment with being a student.

Rights for Students with Cancer

As a student with cancer, you have rights under the law. This law is called the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). You may not think of your cancer diagnosis or treatment as a disability. But the ADA says that if you request it, your school must give you extra help and services.

Some examples of services can include:

- More time to work on assignments.
- Help with notetaking, such as someone to take notes for you during class.
- Special testing arrangements and extra time to take tests.
- On-campus transportation services.
- Flexibility in your class schedule.
- The option to take classes from home, if needed.

Advocating for Yourself and Getting Help

Here are some things you can do to help balance being a student with your cancer care.

Talk with school staff

Talking with school staff can help you learn about what services they offer. You can reach out to:

- Campus Support Services: The name of these offices may be different at your school. They should be able to tell you about what resources you can use to help you with your schoolwork. Ask them what paperwork they need from you so you can use these resources.
- ADA Coordinator: Most public and private schools that get federal funding must have an employee that coordinates services required by the ADA. This includes services for students with cancer.

Make an accommodation request

Most schools need you to make an accommodation request if you want to use special services. This lets you explain which services you need to succeed in school. You will need to make this request by your school's deadline so make sure you do this early.

Submit documentation

You will need to submit documentation with your accommodation request. You may need an official medical report or a letter from your MSK care team. Ask any member of your care team for this. You may need to

update this information every semester depending on your symptoms and which services you need.

Choose the classes that work for you

You may also want to think about the type of environment or classes you will be most comfortable in. Here are some things to think about as you create your schedule and choose classes:

- Class size
- Time of day
- Number and length of classes
- Best places to study
- Online classes

Taking a break from school

Sometimes the side effects from cancer or treatment can make it hard to go to school. If this happens, the best choice may be for you to take a break.

If you decide to take a break from school, talk with your academic advisor and financial office. Do not just stop going to your classes. Every school has their own rules. Make sure you take the right steps so you can go back to school when you feel ready.

Be patient with yourself and others

Remember to be patient as you form your routine around school and your cancer care. Side effects can make it hard for you to focus on your studies. You may also have a hard time connecting with classmates or friends. Talk to your friends and family about how they can best include and support you during this time.

You can also find support on campus through services that most schools offer, including:

- Counseling and mental health services
- Disability centers
- Tutoring centers

MSK Resources

Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Program

MSK's AYA Program helps young adults meet the unique challenges they face during cancer treatment. Working with your care team and specialty services, this program offers support with:

- Life outside of cancer treatment.
- Fertility and sexual health.
- LGBTQ+ resources.

- Working, going to school, or both during cancer treatment.
- Financial and insurance support.
- Mental health resources and counseling.
- Tips for managing treatment side effects.

For more information about the AYA program, email ayaprogram@mskcc.org or call 646-608-8336.

Young Adult Support Group
www.mskcc.org/event/young-adult-support-group
MSK's Young Adult Support Group is an online support group for young adults (ages 21 to 39) who are getting treatment at MSK. A social worker leads discussions about the unique experiences of young adults with cancer. Visit www.mskcc.org/event/young-adult-support-group to learn more or register.

Resources for Life After Cancer (RLAC) program
www.mskcc.org/experience/living-beyond-cancer/services-survivors
MSK's RLAC program provides counseling, support groups, education, and advocacy to cancer survivors and their families. For more information, call 646-888-8106 or email RLAC@mskcc.org

For more information about our other programs and support services, read *Support Resources for Adolescents and Young Adults (AYAs)* (www.mskcc.org/pe/aya_support_resources).

Scholarships for Students with Cancer and Cancer Survivors

The SAM Fund

www.thesamfund.org

The SAM Fund is a grant and scholarship program for young adult cancer survivors. The fund can be used in many ways, including job training, tuition, and medical expenses (such as co-pays and fertility treatments). For more information, call 866-439-9365 or 617-938-3484.

National Collegiate Cancer Foundation (NCCF)

www.collegiatecancer.org

The NCCF provides need-based financial support to young adult cancer survivors who go to school throughout their treatment.

Patient Advocate Foundation (PAF)

www.patientadvocate.org

800-532-5274

PAF offers the Scholarship for Survivors program. This program offers educational scholarships to students living

with cancer or a chronic illness.

More Resources for Students with Cancer

Triage Cancer's Quick Guide to Education Rights and Financial Help

triagecancer.org/QuickGuide-Education

This resource offers helpful information about your rights as a student with cancer.

Cactus Cancer Society's Speaker Series Talk: Creating A Realistic Academic Plan

cactuscancer.org/speaker-series-talk-creating-a-realistic-academic-plan/

This video provides helpful tips for students with cancer.

American Cancer Society's Campus Advocacy

www.fightcancer.org/campus-advocacy

The American Cancer Society offers resources to help you do advocacy work on your campus.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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