



SYSTEMIC DISABILITIES

Systemic disabilities are conditions that affect one or more of the body's systems including respiratory, immunological, neurological and circulatory. As with the majority of disabilities, each may affect individuals differently: some more severely than others. The following is a brief description of some of the more common types of Systemic Disabilities.

Cancer is a malignant growth that can affect any part of the body. Treatment can be time-consuming, painful and sometimes results in permanent disability.

Chemical dependency is considered a disabling condition when it is documented that a person has received treatment for a drug or alcohol addiction and is not currently using. Chemical dependency can cause permanent cognitive impairments.

Diabetes causes a person to lose the ability to regulate blood sugar. People with diabetes often need to follow a strict diet and may require insulin injections. During a diabetic reaction, a person may experience confusion, sudden personality changes or loss of consciousness. In extreme cases diabetes can also cause vision loss, cardiovascular disease, kidney failure, stroke, or the amputation of limbs.

Epilepsy/Seizure Disorder causes a person to experience a loss of consciousness. Episodes, or seizures, vary from short absence or 'petit mal' to the less common 'grand mal'. Seizures are frequently controlled by medications and may not be considered emergency situations.

Epstein Barr Virus/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome is an autoimmune disorder that causes extreme fatigue, loss of appetite, and depression. Physical or emotional stress may adversely affect a person with this condition.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV+) which causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) inhibits one's ability to fight off illness and infections. Over time, infection with HIV can weaken the immune system to the point that the system has difficulty fighting off certain infections. Many of the infections that cause problems or that can be life-threatening for people with AIDS are usually controlled by a healthy immune system.

Lyme's Disease is a multi-systemic condition that can cause paralysis, fatigue, fever, dermatitis, sleeping problems, memory dysfunction, cognitive difficulties, and depression.

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) often results from prolonged exposure to chemicals. A person with MCS becomes increasingly sensitive to chemicals found in the everyday environment. Reactions may be caused by cleaning products, pesticides, petroleum products, vehicle exhaust, tobacco smoke room deodorizers, perfumes and scented personal products. Reactions can include nausea, rashes, lightheadedness and respiratory distress.



Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is a progressive neurological condition with a variety of symptoms including loss of strength, numbness, vision impairments, tremors, and depression. Extreme temperature can also adversely affect a person with MS.

Renal Diseases/Failure can result in loss of bladder control, extreme fatigue, pain, and toxic reactions that may cause cognitive difficulties. Some people with renal disease are on dialysis and have to adhere to a rigid schedule.

People with Systemic Disabilities In The Workplace

Accommodations

- Get to know your employee and ask the employee what he or she needs
- Flexible scheduling should be considered. Someone who tires easily may need to take several short breaks instead of one long one. Instead of four 8-hour days, perhaps five 5-hour days would increase productivity.
- If possible, arrange to have an employee take computer work home if they have compatible equipment.
- If walking long distances is a problem, special parking arrangements may be appropriate. If climbing stairs is a problem, trading job duties may work best.
- Stress and anxiety can aggravate systemic conditions. Break up large projects into smaller ones.
- Discuss any emergency medical concerns or procedures in case someone needs assistance. Be sure to train others who may be close by. Post medical procedures for co-workers to follow should an employee have an insulin reaction or a seizure.
- Provide a personal emergency call system for isolated workstations.
- Avoid the need for standing while performing routine tasks, i.e. using telephone.

This information was compiled by Open Door Group to assist BC businesses to have successful working relationship with persons with disabilities in our communities.

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