

# practicalities of going to university



This information is taken from Epilepsy Society's website:  
[epilepsysociety.org.uk/university-and-epilepsy](http://epilepsysociety.org.uk/university-and-epilepsy)

So, you've decided you're going to university, and selected your course. What next? Planning ahead for the practical things will help to make going to university as straightforward as possible.

## Which university?

Deciding where to study can be as important for anyone going to university as deciding what to study. Are you going to go to a university close to home or will you move away to a new town or city? Will you live at home, or move into student halls of residence or a shared house or flat?

Going to a university close to home means you can live at home or travel home at the weekends and holidays, and be near people and places you know. But you might feel there is a pressure to keep going home, that you won't be independent. Going to university in a completely new area where you don't know anyone can be daunting and scary, or it can be exciting to start a new life with new places to explore.

Finding out as much as possible about your university and the area before you go might be helpful. You could find out where your halls of residence are, where your lectures will be, where the students union and health centre are, and what student support services they have. Check out the university's website and prospectus for more information.

## Disclosing your epilepsy

Disclosing your epilepsy can open up opportunities. Recent research by the Higher Education Council for England (HECFE) has shown that students who are willing to disclose health issues, such as epilepsy, to their university, achieve better results and are less likely to drop out of the education system than those who don't. This is because they are able to obtain the appropriate support that they are entitled to.

If you have epilepsy, your university has certain obligations to you under the Equality Act 2010. This means that they have to treat you fairly. It also means that there are sources of support and help available to you if you ask for them. By telling the university that you have epilepsy, you can find out more about what support is available. Also, most universities have a specific disability adviser or coordinator who can help with advice and getting help.

Although you can contact the university disability advisers or service when you arrive, it may help to contact them beforehand or, even better, before you apply, to see what support they can offer. If you are applying for Disabled Students' Allowance, it is a good idea to apply as far in advance as possible, preferably before you are offered a place or accepted on a course. Check your university website or prospectus to find out what support is available.

You could also ask about going to the university for a visit to talk about help and support. This is an opportunity to find out what support they offer, how it is organised and funded. It is also a chance for you to tell them what specific help or support would be most helpful for you. They may ask you to have a 'risk assessment' to see what support might be appropriate.

 Visit [ucas.ac.uk](http://ucas.ac.uk) to find out more.

## Practical questions

Before you contact or visit the university, you might want to think about the following, or make a list of questions to ask.

- How your epilepsy, seizures or medication might affect your learning, memory or concentration and what might help with this?
- How the course will be run and assessed. For example, how much is lecture based and how much is group work or private study? Whether the course is examined or has coursework or an ongoing assessment?
- Where your lectures or practicals will be held, or where the library is, and where these are in relation to where you will live?
- Where you might live and how this will be affected by your epilepsy, seizures or medication? For example, would living in halls of residence where you have other students around all the time be useful? Or would a seizure alarm or specialist equipment be helpful?
- What help and support are you entitled to, and how can you access this?
- Who can support you during your course, or who can you go to if you have any problems during your course?

### **Support and funding available**

Some universities have funding to provide support for you, or you may be able to get help and support with your application for Disabled Students' Allowance from your university.

### **Disabled Students' Allowances**

Disabled Students' Allowances, or DSAs, are sources of financial support for students with disabilities. They can pay for any costs of attending your course or any help or equipment during your course that occur because of your disability. For example:

- it might help you to buy equipment such as a voice recorder or laptop;
- it might help you to pay for a note-taker during your lectures; or
- it might help with the costs of travel, if you need transport to get to and from different buildings or placements.

Both full-time and part-time students are eligible for DSAs, although the amount you get will vary and depend on the amount of time your course takes up, and on what help you need. DSAs do not depend on your income or your parents' income, and you don't have to pay the money back.

Maximum DSA for full-time and part-time higher education students 2018/19

- Specialist equipment for the entire course: up to £5,529 (full-time or part-time)
- Non-medical helper: up to £21,987 per year (full-time) or up to £16,489 per year (part-time)
- General DSA: up to £1,847 per year (full-time) or up to £1,385 per year (part-time)


These figures are maximum amounts and most students get less.

### **Applying for DSA (Disabled Students' Allowance)**

You will need to complete an application form for DSA. You will need to show 'evidence' that you have a disability. This could be a letter from your GP or specialist, which you may have to pay for. If you live in England, and are due to start your course in the next academic year, you can apply for DSAs as soon as you've sent in your UCAS application. You can tick the DSA box when you apply for your loan from Student Finance England (SFE). If you live in Wales, you need to contact your local authority; in Scotland, your Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS); and in Northern Ireland, your local education and library board (ELB).

If you are eligible for DSA you will need to have a needs assessment to see what specific help and support would be suitable for you. This will be done at an approved 'Access Centre'. You can take someone with you if you like. A report will be sent to you and to Student Finance England (or the relevant authority) about what help you need. Student Finance England (or the relevant authority) will then write to you about how you can arrange for the help you need.

As well as DSA, you may be eligible for other financial support. Contact support services at your university.

 Visit [disabilityrightsuk.org](https://disabilityrightsuk.org) or call their **Disabled Students Helpline on 0330 995 0414 (Tuesday and Thursday 11am-1pm).**


## Personal Independence Payment

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is a benefit for working age people (16 to 64 years) who have a long-term disability or health condition, and need help or support with daily living, or with mobility, or both.

You can claim PIP whether or not you are in work and it is not means-tested (so does not depend on your income or savings). PIP aims to help towards the extra costs that come from having a health condition or disability. If you receive PIP you can spend the money in whatever way you think is best.

## Access to learning funds

If you need extra financial support (sometimes known as being in 'hardship'), you may be eligible for access to learning funds through your university or college. Whether you are eligible or not depends on your personal and financial situation. The fund may be able to help with costs of your course, help to keep studying or help with your everyday living costs. You need to apply directly to your university, through the student services department, after you have started the course. They will tell you exactly how to apply for the fund. Although the fund is not directly related to having a disability, students with disabilities are usually seen as a priority for the fund.

 [Find out more about these and other benefits at gov.uk.](#)

## Travel and transport

A disabled persons railcard might be worth considering – it's a better deal than the 16-25 railcard. It costs £20 for one year or £54 for three, (compared to £30 for a year or £70 for three years for a 16-25 railcard). And it gets you and a friend/family member a third off most rail fares (with the 16-25 railcard you only get a third off your own fare). There are no time restrictions on the disabled persons railcard and so you can use it to get a discount on tickets at any time of the day.

 [Visit \[disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk\]\(http://disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk\) for more information.](#)

You might also be eligible for a free national bus pass, which you can use on local buses, between 9.30am and 11pm Monday to Friday, and all day at weekends and on Bank Holidays. Contact your local council for an application form or visit gov.uk. Some coach operators, such as National Express, also have half-fare schemes for people with disabilities. Contact your local coach companies to find out more.

## Hints and tips

There are potentially lots of practical things that you may find helpful.

- Register with a GP and find out where the pharmacy is. Have a supply of your AEDs when you arrive.
- If you have an appointment with your epilepsy specialist before going to university, you might want to discuss any concerns you might have and plan for future appointments with them. Plan ahead for your new routine. Would a calendar or diary help to keep track of your studies, deadlines and social life?
- You might like to download our free 'epilepsy society' app, for first aid information and a seizure diary. Think about if it would help to have something that says you have epilepsy, an ID card or medical jewellery.

 [Visit \[livingmadeeasy.org.uk\]\(http://livingmadeeasy.org.uk\) who have details on medical jewellery or contact our helpline for a free ID card.](#)

## Think beyond epilepsy

Of course, your university experience is more than just about the degree and your epilepsy. It's also about trying new things and making the most of new social activities. You can sign up for groups, sports and activities during freshers' week. Think about what you can do (not what you can't) and what you enjoy. What have you always wanted to try? Deciding on what you want to do and thinking about whether some safety measures might help to keep you safe, means you can put epilepsy in perspective.

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[epilepsysociety.org.uk](http://epilepsysociety.org.uk)



**helpline**  
**01494 601 400**

Monday and Tuesday 9am to 4pm  
Wednesday 9am to 7.30pm  
Confidential (national call rate)