



## Know Your Rights: Accommodations

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**In order to be able to continue their studies, some students with impairments relating to pregnancy, childbirth, abortion, or miscarriage may need an adjustment in how, when, or where they complete academic work.**

Here are examples of pregnancy-related accommodations:

*“Mary” had pregnancy-related frequent urination. Mary’s university enabled her to take her exams near a bathroom and provided time for breaks so that her grades wouldn’t suffer from spending precious exam minutes in the bathroom.*

*“Janet” has pregnancy-related carpal tunnel syndrome. Her college provided her with a note-taker when typing became too difficult.*

*“Jesse” couldn’t lift and move heavy lab equipment while recovering from her C-section. The school allowed others to assist her.*

### WHEN MUST MY SCHOOL PROVIDE AN ACCOMMODATION FOR MY PREGNANCY?

Most students who need a pregnancy-related accommodation will be entitled to it under one of these circumstances:

- **If you have a pregnancy-related impairment that is considered a disability under the ADA** (Americans with Disabilities Act) you are entitled to reasonable accommodations. Many pregnancy-related impairments are covered.
- **If your school provides accommodations or services to students with temporary disabilities (hint: they’re legally required to!) Title IX says you are entitled to be treated the same.** Review your school’s ADA or disability accommodation policy for more information on temporary disability policies.

### WHO IS ENTITLED TO AN ACCOMMODATION UNDER THE ADA?

Many pregnancy-related impairments are covered by the ADA, and must be accommodated. Impairments covered under the ADA are those that substantially limit one or more major life activities, like walking, thinking, concentrating, eating, standing, lifting, sleeping, or the functioning of normal bodily systems. This is a technical definition and every case is different, but the bottom line is that if you need assistance, you should ask for help under the ADA.



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Examples of pregnancy-related conditions that have been considered disabilities include:

- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Gestational diabetes
- Acid Reflux (“Gastroesophageal reflux” or “GERD”)
- Severe morning sickness (Hyperemesis gravidarum)
- Urinary tract or bladder infections
- Chronic migraines
- Severe pelvic bone and/or back pain

For a list of common pregnancy-related conditions and helpful accommodations, click [here](#). For information about your school’s policies, contact your school’s disability support services program or ADA/Disability Services Coordinator. If you are having trouble finding the office, ask a Title IX officer, a professor, your academic advisor, or the dean of student affairs.

### HOW DO I SEEK AN ACCOMMODATION?

#### **Step 1: Identify what you need**

If you are faced with a challenging condition, remember that your symptoms and needs are not always apparent to professors and school administrators. The first step is to think about your condition, and the ways that the institution can accommodate you so that you can continue your studies.

*Example: Janet has severe hand pain, and was diagnosed with a pregnancy-related carpal tunnel. Because she can’t type her notes in class, she decides that it would be helpful if she could record class.*

#### **Step 2: Ask for assistance**

Ask for assistance from your professors or your university’s disability support office. All institutions have specially trained coordinators that assist students in securing accommodations. If you have difficulty finding the office, ask an adviser or dean of student affairs. You may also contact your school’s Title IX Coordinator.

*Example: Janet goes to the disabled student’s program and fills out a form requesting an accommodation of recording her classes.*

*TIP: Make your request in writing. Be sure to describe how your condition affects your education and how the requested accommodations would help you.*



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### **Step 3: Documentation**

Your school may ask for documentation of your medical needs. You may be asked to submit a doctor's note identifying your condition and related limitations, or in some cases you may need records relating to your condition. You do not have to provide medical information to a professor directly—your school's disability support office has officials who are specially trained and will keep your information private. If your professor asks you for private health information that you do not feel comfortable disclosing, tell them politely that you have provided the necessary information to the disability office.

### **Step 4: Work with your school to identify appropriate accommodations**

A school must consider your request for accommodation in good faith. You and your university must be willing to engage in an interactive process to determine the best way to accommodate your pregnancy-related disability. You may need to have several discussions to determine an appropriate accommodation.

*Example: Janet is told that her request to record classes will be difficult to accommodate because of current policies. But that is not the end of the conversation! Instead, the University offers to provide Janet with a note taker to type her notes for her. Assuming she will still need assistance at the end of the semester, they also offer to set up text-to-speech software for Janet to be able to compose her final papers and exams even if her hands hurt.*

The accommodation you receive must be tailored to your specific needs and give you an opportunity to succeed in the program that is equal to the opportunity given to other students. However, your school is not required to offer an accommodation that would be "unreasonable" because it causes significant administrative or financial burden. Universities also can't be forced to make "fundamental or substantial modifications" that change the very nature of their programs or academic standards.

*Example: One of Janet's classes is a speed-typing elective. Because typing quickly is the entire purpose of the course, it would be impossible for someone else to type Janet's exams. The university will mark her grade as an incomplete for the semester, but Janet will be allowed to finish the class without penalty when she has recovered.*

If you have questions about what is reasonable, consider contacting a student advocate, attorney, or trusted mentor. If your request is denied, you can appeal the decision using your university's appeal procedures, or file a complaint with the Department of Education.



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### ***Step 5: Accommodations granted***

If your school required you to seek accommodations through an ADA office, the office should make a decision and then inform your professors of your accommodations, or give you the resources to do so. Often the office will provide a letter informing professors that they must provide accommodations.

*Example: Janet agrees with the accommodations offered by the University. The disability office provides Janet with a letter confirming that Janet is entitled to typing accommodations, and provides her with a typist in class that next week.*