

Starting University with Sickle Cell Disease



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General advice for moving to university

Bring decorations for your bedroom - Especially in first year halls, Uni rooms can often be quite dull. Bringing pictures, lights, plants and other decorations can make your space feel more homely and less boring.



Put effort into meeting new people - Moving to university can be very daunting when you don't know anyone, however it's important to remember that everyone is in the same position. Put yourself out there! Suggest meeting for a coffee, join a society or start a conversation with someone next to you in a lecture. Especially in freshers and first year, everyone is looking to make new friends.

Sign up to a society - Societies are essentially extracurricular clubs and most universities offer hundreds of them. They are a great way to meet new people, continue a hobby which you are passionate about or even discover something new.

Discover how you like to learn - University is very different from school. You have a lot more independence and freedom to discover how you enjoy studying. Take the time to work out what works for you, whether that's working from the library or at home, making notes on a laptop or by hand etc.



University is such a fun experience so don't forget to enjoy it!

Advice more specific to people living with sickle cell disease

Register with a local GP surgery - It's important to have support and medical care close to you if you need it.

Housing situation - When the time comes to find a house (this is often for second year), ensure that there will be sufficient heating so that your house will be warm. Some university housing can be quite run down and bills can be expensive, so start looking for options early in the year to get the best deals. Heated blankets can also be a cost-effective way to stay warm in the colder months. Also, sharing a house with friends is not only fun, it can be helpful to have people around you who are aware of your condition.



Sign up to student disability - This may not be something you want to sign up for but making the university aware of health conditions means that they can provide more support for you. Some examples are that you may be eligible for bursaries, the university could grant you special consideration when it comes to exams/assessments and even offer opportunities to speak to professionals in counselling type sessions. These measures may help to reduce stress levels and enable you to feel more understood.

Create a crisis protocol - It's important to make sure you always have easy access to your medications. Creating a list of steps to do and medication to take when you feel a crisis coming could hopefully prevent it escalating. Remember not to suffer in silence, make sure you tell someone when you are experiencing a crisis.



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Think about sexual health - This is an essential aspect of university life that everyone should consider, including protection against STIs. If contraception is something you are thinking about, it's important to discuss your options with your doctor as some methods may be less suitable for people with sickle cell disease. This link can also provide some more information about contraceptives and their safety with sickle cell disease.



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<https://www.imperial.nhs.uk/-/media/website/patient-information-leaflets/haematology/red-blood-cell-disease/contraceptive-advice-for-patients-with-sickle-cell-disease.pdf?rev=e09ca20d4e2b4290a701792270939b83>

Stay protected from infection - Keeping up to date with vaccinations before you go to university is a good precaution to prevent illness. Common colds and flu can be more dangerous for people living with SCD so keeping on top of hand hygiene and cleanliness, especially in shared areas like bathrooms and dormitories, will hopefully reduce the chance of catching these illnesses.



Alcohol advice - The overall recommendation for people living with sickle cell disease is to avoid consuming alcohol. This is because alcohol often causes dehydration, therefore increasing the risk of having a crisis. However, we understand that a lot of people at university do drink alcohol. If you do decide to, it is very important to remain hydrated. One way to potentially do this is by drinking equal parts alcohol and water.

We hope you now feel more equipped for your new chapter!
Always remember there is support if you need it.

You can contact us at info@togetherwecan.uk if you have any questions:)