

Balancing health, homework

Students learning to live with physical ailments face daily challenges

Bailey Muehlstein
Feature Editor

As students return from Christmas break, sickness begins to inflict all schools and piles of make-up work are expected. However, those dealing with chronic illnesses or those recovering from head trauma may find themselves struggling to keep up with school just as much as those feeling under the weather.

Throughout the year, students struggle to find a balance between sickness and schooling.

"At the beginning of the year, it's a lot easier to not fall behind, so it isn't worth [coming to school when sick]," junior Trey Schwartz said. "However, at the end of the year it is necessary to go to school to not fall behind."

Some students find their balance of sickness and schooling by attending part-time until they are well again.

"I usually just go for that one class, if it is a really important class that I need to be there for," senior Abby Eubank said.

The arrival of cold and flu season makes it hard for students to attend school, but trying to make up work from missed classes can be just as sickening.

"It's difficult to miss school knowing that I will have work to make up, and the fact that I will be behind," Eubank said. "I definitely don't want to get others sick, but it is usually easier to attend so that I don't

miss any important work."

Being absent makes it difficult for sickly students to complete their make-up work without a proper understanding of what they are doing, but there are a variety of ways that help is offered.

"It's difficult to understand the concepts of what was gone over in class," Schwartz said. "[To get caught up,] I ask friends for notes and look over them."

Different students have different ways of coping with lost time when returning to school.

"When I come back, I go to every teacher of the classes that I missed, and just do my best to get caught up," Eubank said.

Schwartz sees the answer to the question of absence or attendance quite clearly.

"I think it is better to attend and be sick because you will have a greater

chance to understand the lessons you might miss," Schwartz said.

At some point, most athletes experience a different kind of sickness, an injury. Broken bones and torn muscles are both common, but recently a light has been shining on those who experience concussions. Attending school with a concussion is difficult, and time missed to recover only makes the stack of homework grow taller.

"I got my concussion playing football," sophomore Sterlyn Hartman said. "At first I had a lot of trouble focusing, and I would get frequent migraines."

The sports world is no

stranger to concussions, but contrary to popular belief, concussions can occur in a variety of other ways.

"Last spring break I was in El Paso for a mission trip," senior Anna Gray said. "I was changing my bunkbed and I leaned into a ceiling fan. It was on high and it hit me on the head four or five times, cut my head open, and left a knot along with a concussion."

Though not every concussion is the same, common side effects like nausea, high sensitivity to light and sound, and lack of concentration leave little room for those affected to perform everyday tasks.

"When I wasn't in school I couldn't watch TV, be on my phone, read, or do any type of work," Gray said. "I had to lay there and sleep in a dark room."

Not only do concussions leave their victims feeling absent-minded, affected students tend to miss school as a part of the healing process.

"You get really behind on work, and you are very confused due to the fact that you have to teach yourself lessons," Hartman said.

For some, rest and a routine can diminish the effects of a concussion, but for others, time is the only cure.

"I have post-concussion syndrome, so I've had problems with my concussion since March of 2015," Gray said. "[The effects] still occur to this day, but have dimmed down significantly."

When students are able to return to school, they come back slowly to help with the process of adjusting to the environment.

"I went for what are called 'half-days' which are either just coming until lunch, or just coming from lunch until the end of the day," Hartman said.

After being away for some

time, returning to school can be a somewhat awkward experience.

"Most days during school I feel okay, but I have days where I have some of the worst headaches and it comes to a point where it is hard to function," Gray said. "It's tough when it's bad, you really just have to try and work with your teachers."

Though not as prevalent as the common cold, or even concussions, some students must find a way to attend school while struggling with a chronic disease. Students often talk about how school, sports, and extra-curricular activities take a toll on their bodies and minds, but senior Peyton Fischer knows this all too well after being diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome [CFS].

"Chronic Fatigue is a disorder that gives you extreme fatigue that doesn't get better with rest," Fischer said. "CFS makes you feel like you have the flu, ran a marathon, and been hit by a car all at once."

During Christmas break of last year, Fischer underwent testing for lupus and mononucleosis after weeks of persisting influenza-like symptoms.

"All the tests and repeat tests were negative, so they sent me to Cook's Children's Hospital to a rheumatologist," Fischer said. "She diagnosed me within two hours and we set up a treatment plan."

Considering the toll that

CFS takes on the mind and body, school and other activities are somewhat of a chore.

"I miss a lot of school, but I try to stay caught up while trying to feel better," Fischer said. "I try to at least get to school and go, but if I am hurting and cannot focus because of the CFS, then I have the option of going home knowing that I tried to attend."

The cooperation of teachers has been key to staying caught up since the diagnosis.

"All the teachers have been very understanding," Fischer said. "If I cannot attend school the teachers email my work, but if I am at school and not feeling well all my teachers are understanding and let me rest or do my work when I feel able."

Some students try to find ways to get out of school, but after missing so much Fischer is almost eager to return.

"My teachers know that if I am not at school I'm probably sick," Fischer said. "I hate missing though, not just because it's my last year, but also because that is just my personality."

Because CFS is not typically seen at such a young age, finding a treatment plan has been difficult, but upon returning to school Fischer feels as though nothing has changed.

"I am treated just the same as others," Fischer said. "[When I come back] it's as if I was never gone."



Schwartz



Eubank



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