

Help Your Child With JA Get the Most Out of College

Get tips on choosing the right school for your teenager with arthritis.

For many college-bound high school students, finding the right school is stressful, time-consuming and exhilarating. This is especially true for college hopefuls who live with arthritis. For many, the school's infrastructure and student support services are just as important factors as academic rigor and student life opportunities.

Here, Amelia DiLapo and Gina Salerno – sophomores at Pennsylvania's Messiah College who have lived with [juvenile idiopathic arthritis](#) since the age of 2 – offer tips for choosing the right school and making the most of it once on campus.

Consider the campus environment and how it fits in with your personal needs: Research the lay of the land on campus and the surrounding area, the weather and distances between the dorm, classrooms and other college facilities.

"They could hinder you if you have a flare," says Amelia.

Understand the college's disabilities policy: Is the university willing to work with you in terms of special housing, excuses from classes and other associated needs?

"I registered with the office of special needs and I was placed in disability housing on the ground floor for better access," says Gina.

Pay attention to the college's medical accommodations: Is there a nursing staff on call that can help with medicine needs and other issues that may arise? Know your rights and responsibilities.

According to the [U.S. Department of Education's \(DOE\) Office for Civil Rights \(OCR\)](#), students have responsibilities as a postsecondary student that they do not have as a high school student. The OCR strongly encourages students to know their responsibilities and those of postsecondary schools under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Consult the DOE publication, "Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities." Doing so will improve your opportunity to succeed as you enter postsecondary education, according to the DOE.

Look at the surrounding area: If you had a major flare or problem, where would you go? Is there a specialist near the school?

"It's important to know where you could go if you were not able to go to your regular doctor," says Amelia.

Don't pass up opportunities because of arthritis: Have your doctor do research to get the facts. Research by Amelia's local doctor allowed her to go to Belize, which required her to take a malaria prevention drug. He cleared her to go after he learned the medication would not affect her arthritis.

Have a positive attitude: Don't let your arthritis be the deciding factor in your college choice, simply be aware of your surroundings and possibilities in case of a problem.

"I've never let arthritis keep me down. I've always played soccer and softball, and been very active ... keep a positive attitude and just deal with it: If you don't make it a big deal, it won't be a big deal," Amelia says.