Disabilities and their Definitions

According to the Employment Equity, Act, No. 55 of 1998 people with disabilities are people who have a long term or recurring physical or mental impairment which substantially limits their prospect of entry into, or advancement in, employment.

To qualify for protection under the Act one must meet all of the following 3 criteria:

I. A person must have an impairment that is either PHYSICAL or MENTAL or a combination of both. Impairment is the total or partial loss of bodily function or part of the body including sensory impairment. Sensory impairment includes the deaf, blind and hearing impaired. Mental impairment is a clinically recognised condition which affects a person’s thought processes, judgements or emotions; this includes intellectual or emotional or learning disabilities.

II. The impairment must be LONG TERM or RECURRING or likely to exist in the long term. Long term is a period of 12 months or more. Recurring means that it is likely to happen again and that it is substantially limiting. The effects of the condition may go away for a period but they are never cured. This includes constant chronic conditions. Progressive conditions (those which are likely to develop or change or recur) are only regarded as a disability when they become substantially limiting. A person with cancer, TB or HIV would only be regarded as a person living with a disability by the Employment Equity Act once the condition becomes substantially limiting to the person’s ability to perform the job.

III. SUBSTANTIALLY LIMITING – An impairment is regarded as substantially limiting if its nature, duration or effects substantially limit a person’s ability to perform the essential functions of the job for which he/she is being considered.

Types of Disabilities

Recognised disabilities include:

- spinal injuries - quadriplegic, paraplegic
- physical disabilities and deformities - post polio, amputations, arthritis, cerebral palsy
- epilepsy
- traumatic brain injuries and neurological disorders, strokes
- visual impairments - blind, degrees of blindness, retinitis pigmentosa, albinism
- hearing impairments - deaf, degrees of deafness
- psychiatric conditions - depression, bi-polar mood disorder, personality disorders
- learning disabilities – dyslexia, downs syndrome
- communication / speech problems

Due to discriminatory perceptions, stereotypes, fears and myths most people are under the impression that people with disabilities are only suitable for positions such as switchboard operators and reception. However, a person with a disability, taking into account possible reasonable accommodations, can perform any type of work. People with disabilities are individuals with their own abilities. Research around the world has proved that people with disabilities are productive, reliable and loyal employees.
**Disability Definitions**

These disability definitions have been compiled from information available from disability organizations. The information here is for guidance only. It is not to be considered as medical advice. Consult a medical professional if you require a diagnosis or more information.

Disability is defined as “a long-term or recurring physical or mental impairment, which substantially limits prospects of entry into, or advancement in employment”. Only people who satisfy all the criteria in the definition are considered as persons with disabilities.

A
- Acoustic neuroma
- Acquired brain injury
- Addison’s disease
- Aicardi syndrome
- AIDS
- Allergies
- Alzheimer disease
- Amputee
- Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)
- Ankylosing spondylitis
- Anxiety disorder
- Aphasia
- Aplastic anemia
- Arthritis
- Asperger syndrome
- Asthma
- Attention deficit disorder (ADD)
- Autism/PDD

B
- Back injury
- Bipolar disorders
- Blindness and low vision
- Brain injury
- Brittle bone disease
- Burns-related disability

C
- Cerebral palsy
- Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease/HNPP
- Chronic fatigue syndrome
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Chronic pain
- Cleft lip and palate
- Cognitive disability
- Colostomy
- Communication disability
- Complex regional pain syndrome
- Cooley’s anemia
- Crohn’s disease and colitis
- Cystic fibrosis

D
- Deaf blindness
- Deafness and hearing loss
Depression
Developmental disability
Diabetes
Down syndrome
Dwarfism
Dyslexia
Dystonia

E
ehlers-Danlos syndrome
Environmental sensitivity
Epilepsy/seizure disorder

F
Facial difference
Fetal alcohol syndrome/effects
Fibromyalgia
Friedreich’s ataxia

G
Genetic disease
Glaucoma
Guillain-Barré, syndrome

H
Head injury
Hearing loss
Heart disease
Hemophilia
Hepatitis C
HIV/AIDS
Huntington disease
Hydrocephalus
Hyperactivity
Hyperlexia

I
Ileostomy
Inflammatory bowel disease
Intellectual disability

J
Juvenile arthritis
Juvenile diabetes

K
Kidney disease

L
Laryngectomy
Learning disability
Leprosy
Low vision
Lung disease
Lupus
Lymphovenous disorder
<p>| M   | Manic depression                  |
| M   | Marfan syndrome                  |
| M   | Mental health disability         |
| M   | Mental retardation               |
| M   | Metabolic disorder               |
| M   | Migraines and chronic headaches  |
| M   | Mucopolysaccharide disease       |
| M   | Multiple chemical sensitivity    |
| M   | Multiple sclerosis               |
| M   | Muscular dystrophy               |
| M   | Musculoskeletal pain             |
| M   | Myalgic encephalomyelitis        |
| M   | Myasthenia gravis                |
| M   | Myelin disease                   |
| M   | Ménière’s disease                |
| N   | Neurofibromatosis                |
| N   | Neurological disability          |
| N   | Neuromuscular disability         |
| O   | Obsessive compulsive disorder    |
| O   | Occupational injury or disease   |
| O   | Osteogenesis imperfecta          |
| O   | Osteoporosis                     |
| O   | Ostomy                           |
| P   | Pain                             |
| P   | Parkinson’s disease              |
| P   | Polio and post-polio syndrome    |
| P   | Post-war syndrome                |
| P   | Prader-Willi syndrome            |
| P   | Psychiatric disability           |
| Q   | None Listed                      |
| R   | Reflex sympathetic dystrophy syndrome |
| R   | Retinitis pigmentosa             |
| R   | Rett syndrome                    |
| S   | Schizophrenia                    |
| S   | Scleroderma                      |
| S   | Seizure disorder                 |
| S   | Short stature                    |
| S   | Sickle cell anemia               |
| S   | Sjögren syndrome                 |
| S   | Spasmodic dysphonia              |
| S   | Speech/language disability       |
| S   | Spina bifida and hydrocephalus   |
| S   | Spinal cord injury               |
| S   | Stroke                           |</p>
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**Acoustic neuroma**
An acoustic neuroma, neurinoma or schwannoma is a brain tumour on the hearing nerve or, in some cases, the balance nerve. One-sided hearing loss or deafness, ear noises, dizziness, balance problems, unsteady gait, headaches, facial numbness, facial tingling or spasms, visual disturbances can all be symptoms of an acoustic neuroma. Early detection is extremely important

**Acquired brain injury**
An acquired brain injury is an injury to the brain that has occurred after birth -- not a congenital injury or an injury at the time of birth. Causes could include a car accident, a gunshot wound or a fall. An acquired brain injury may result in cognitive, speech-language, memory, physical or behavioral disabilities

**Addison's disease**
Addison’s disease is a hormonal (endocrine) disorder involving destruction of the adrenal glands (small glands adjacent to the kidneys). The diseased glands can no longer produce sufficient adrenal hormones (specifically, cortisol) necessary for the normal daily body functions. The disease is characterized by weight loss, muscle weakness, fatigue, low blood pressure, and sometimes darkening of the skin in both exposed and non-exposed parts of the body.

**Aicardi syndrome**
Aicardi syndrome is a rare disorder that only affects females. It is characterized by: the partial or complete absence of the corpus callosum, the structure that connects the two hemispheres of the brain; childhood seizures; intellectual disability; and lesions of the eye’s retina. Aicardi syndrome may be related to other brain defects such as microcephaly (small brain) or porencephalic cysts (cerebrospinal fluid-filled cavities or gaps in the brain). Onset of Aicardi syndrome generally begins between the ages of 3 and 5 months.
AIDS
AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) is the final and most serious stage of HIV disease. HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is spread through sexual contact, blood (blood transfusions or needle sharing) and childbirth (mother to child). HIV attacks the immune system by gradually destroying the white blood cells that fight infection. The body loses its ability to defend itself from other opportunistic diseases. Symptoms of HIV, which may not show up for years after initial exposure, include fevers, sweats, chills, weakness and weight loss. Most individuals infected with HIV will progress to AIDS if not treated.

Allergies
Allergy involves a misguided response of the immune system. A small number of allergic people are susceptible to a reaction called anaphylaxis, which can lead to shock. Anaphylaxis is often triggered by substances that are injected or ingested and thereby gain access into the bloodstream. An explosive reaction involving the skin, lungs, nose, throat and gastrointestinal tract can then result. Although severe cases of anaphylaxis can occur within seconds or minutes of exposure and be fatal if untreated, many reactions are milder and can be ended with prompt medical therapy.

Alzheimer disease
Alzheimer disease is a progressive, neurodegenerative disease that usually begins after age 65 but can occur as early as 40. Over several years it causes decreased cognitive abilities and ability to function. Its characteristics include: memory loss, language deterioration, impaired visuospatial skills, poor judgment, indifferent attitude, and sometimes confusion and restlessness, but preserved motor function. The early signs of Alzheimer disease, such as forgetfulness and loss of concentration, can often be mistaken for signs of normal aging or other factors.

Amputee
An amputee is a person who does not have both arms or legs, or complete hands or feet. Some amputees are born without these limbs, while others have had them removed through accident or disease. Amputees may use prosthetic limbs for function, mobility or cosmetic purposes. They may use mobility aids such as canes, crutches or wheelchairs. Many amputees experience pain or sensation from a "phantom limb," which can be a significant complication.

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)
Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig’s disease or motor neuron disease, is a rapidly progressive neuromuscular disease. It affects the motor neurons responsible for transmitting electrical impulses from the brain to the voluntary muscles throughout the body. When these muscles fail to receive messages, they eventually lose strength and waste away. Someone with ALS may have difficulty walking, using a cane or walker at first for mobility and then eventually a wheelchair. As the muscles of the limbs become weaker, difficulties in speaking and swallowing begin to occur. There is usually a gradual decrease in lung vital capacity as the muscles of the chest and the diaphragm weaken, resulting in the need for a ventilator. This progression may take six months or several years.

Ankylosing spondylitis
Ankylosing spondylitis is a form of arthritis that affects the spine. The vertebrae are constantly inflamed and may eventually be caused to fuse together. Ankylosing spondylitis causes pain (often severe) and stiffness in the back, and also bent posture. It may also cause pain and tenderness in the ribs, shoulder blades, hips, thighs, shins and heels. Usually the condition is characterized by acute painful episodes and remissions. Ankylosing spondylitis is sometimes called poker back, rheumatoid spondylitis or Marie-Strumpell’s spondylitis.

Anxiety disorder
Anxiety or panic disorder is characterized by very sudden panic attacks that are often disabling. A panic attack may occur anytime and anywhere (e.g. while driving or while shopping in a crowded store) and appear to be unprovoked. Once these attacks occur, the individual may develop phobias of having another attack and begin to avoid situations. In this way, this pattern can lead to the inability to do routine daily activities such as driving or going out for a walk. It has a major impact on a person’s daily life and may lead to other health issues.

Aphasia
Aphasia is a communication disorder that is caused by damage to sections of the brain that are responsible for language. Most often, it occurs abruptly as the result of a stroke or acquired brain injury; however, it may also develop gradually, for instance in the case of a brain tumour. Aphasia impairs the ability to express and understand language (i.e. reading and writing). It may occur in conjunction with speech disorders.

**Aplastic anemia**
Aplastic anemia is a rare but extremely serious disorder that results from the unexplained failure of the bone marrow to produce red and white blood cells and platelets. Aplastic anemia is not cancer, but is given the same treatment as many cancers of the blood. Aplastic anemia can be caused by exposure to toxic chemicals, certain viruses (for instance, some kinds of hepatitis), in which case it is considered secondary, or it may arise on its own with no known cause, in which case it is considered primary.

**Arthritis**
Arthritis actually refers to more than 100 different conditions. These can be anything from relatively mild forms of tendinitis (as in tennis elbow) and bursitis to systemic forms that result in significant disability, such as rheumatoid arthritis. There are pain syndromes, like fibromyalgia, and arthritis-related disorders, such as systemic lupus erythematosus, that involve every part of the body. All of all these conditions involve joint and musculoskeletal pain, usually caused by inflammation of the joint lining. When a joint becomes inflamed, it can prevent the normal use of the joint. Arthritis affects people of all ages, not just older people.

**Asperger syndrome**
Asperger syndrome is a pervasive developmental disorder that tends to be classified at the "high end" of the autism spectrum. Someone with Asperger syndrome may have difficulties with social interaction, clumsy and uncoordinated motor movements, limited interests and/or unusual preoccupations, repetitive routines or rituals, speech and language peculiarities, and non-verbal communication problems. Generally, children with AS have few facial expressions apart from anger or misery. Most have excellent rote memory and musical ability, and become intensely interested in one or two subjects (sometimes to the exclusion of other topics). Children with AS tend to be "in their own world" and preoccupied with their own agenda.

**Asthma**
Asthma is a breathing problem that results from chronic inflammation of the lining of the airways in the lungs, which makes these airways contract easily. Along with the long-term inflammation someone with autism may have an increase in mucus, "twitchy" airways, shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing and congestion. Asthma is generally managed by avoiding the things that make it worse (for instance, staying indoors when air pollution is high) and taking medications.

**Attention deficit disorder (ADD)**
Attention deficit disorder (ADD), or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), is a neurobiological condition and a learning disability. Its characteristics include lack of concentration, impulsiveness, and sometimes hyperactivity. The symptoms vary in intensity depending on the individual. Children with ADD often have problems at school because they are required to sit still and pay attention for long periods of time -- two activities with which they may have difficulty. Many adults have learned special strategies to cope with ADD.

**Autism/PDD**
Autism and pervasive development disorders (which are not exactly the same) affect a person’s development and are evident during the first three years of life. The disorders are four times more common in boys than in girls. Features include communication problems, difficulty understanding and developing social relationships, unusual and repetitive behaviors, and unusual sensory responses. While there is no known cure, the effects of autism can be lessened significantly with training.

**Back injury**
A healthy back is straight and strong, moves easily and is free of pain. When there is pain in any area of the back for a very long period of time (i.e. more than a month), this is called chronic back injury, or chronic back pain. The most common area of chronic back injury is the lower back, or lumbar spine. Herniated discs are also a common source of back pain.

**Bipolar disorders**
Formerly called manic-depression, bipolar disorder is not as common as other forms of depressive disorders. Bipolar disorder involves cycles of depression and elation or mania. Sometimes the mood switches are dramatic and rapid, but most often they are gradual. When in the depressed cycle, a person can have any or all of the symptoms of a depressive disorder. When manic, a person’s thinking, judgment and social behavior can be affected in ways that cause serious problems and embarrassment, for instance he or she might make unwise business or financial decisions. Bipolar disorder is often a chronic, recurring condition.

**Blindness and low vision**
Blindness is a disability that affects a person’s eyesight. Normal vision is 20/20. Someone who is legally blind has 20/200 vision or worse. Eighty per cent of blind people have some vision, such as light perception. People who have some useful vision, but who cannot achieve clear vision by wearing glasses or contact lenses, are considered to have low vision. Low vision generally means a person’s vision does not meet their needs. They may be able to improve it somewhat with visual devices such as computer screen enlargers.

**Brain injury**
An acquired brain injury is an injury to the brain that has occurred after birth -- not a congenital injury or an injury at the time of birth. Causes could include a car accident, a gunshot wound or a fall. An acquired brain injury may result in cognitive, speech-language, memory, physical or behavioral disabilities.

**Brittle bone disease**
Osteogenesis imperfecta (OI), also called brittle bone disease, is a genetic disorder characterized by bones that break easily, often from little or no apparent cause. There are four major types of OI, all of them affecting the body’s production of collagen, the major protein of the body’s connective tissue, and thus weakening the bones. Besides having bones predisposed to fracture, someone with OI might have spinal curvature, short stature, hearing loss, certain facial characteristics including a triangular face, loose joints and poor muscle development in arms and legs. Features of OI vary greatly from person to person -- even among people with the same type of OI, and even within the same family.

**Burns-related disability**
Third-degree burns are serious enough burns to cause skin death, resulting in long-term effects to the body. Damage to skin by burns can also predispose a person to infection at the site of the wound as well as internally. People who have experienced third-degree burns may have effects disabilities. Burns on the face, hands, feet and genitalia are the most serious because of possible lack of function.

**Cerebral palsy**
Cerebral palsy is a term used to describe a group of conditions affecting body movement and muscle coordination. It results from damage to the developing brain (the damage can occur anywhere from early pregnancy to about age two). It interferes with transmission of messages between the brain and body. The effects of CP vary widely from individual to individual. They may include: muscle tightness or spasm, involuntary movement, difficulty with walking, writing and speaking, and abnormal perception and sensation. The brain damage that causes cerebral palsy may also lead to other conditions such as seizures, learning disabilities, developmental delay and intellectual disability. It is non-progressive, but not unchanging. So, while the damage will not get worse, the effects of CP on the body may change depending on a person’s age, fitness level or health.

**Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease/HNPP**
Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease (CMT) is a hereditary neurological disorder in which the myelin sheath on the nerves does not stay intact, so the messages between the brain and muscles are not carried properly. Most people experience some loss of movement, and the muscles atrophy as a result. CMT is also called peroneal muscular atrophy (PMA) because the peroneal muscle down the front of the shin that enables you to pull your foot up is usually the first muscle to be affected, resulting in a dropped foot which causes tripping and sloppy walking. Many people with CMT cannot feel or move anything from the knees down.

**Chronic fatigue syndrome**
Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) is an emerging condition characterized by debilitating fatigue (experienced as exhaustion and extremely poor stamina), neurological problems, and a variety of flu-like symptoms. It is also known as chronic fatigue immune dysfunction syndrome and Myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME). The core symptoms include excessive fatigue that is not relieved by rest, general pain, mental fogginess, and often gastrointestinal problems. Many other symptoms may also be present; however, they will typically be different among individuals. These include: fatigue following stressful activities; headaches; sore throat; sleep disorders; and abnormal temperature. The degree of severity can differ widely among individuals, and will also vary over time for the same person. This variation, in addition to the fact that its cause is not yet known, makes this syndrome difficult to diagnose.

**Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)**

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or lung disease, refers to a number of disorders that obstruct the airways. Examples include chronic bronchitis, emphysema and pulmonary fibrosis. The main symptom of lung disease is shortness of breath, accompanied by a cough or wheezing, sometimes brought on by exertion.

**Chronic pain**

While acute pain is a normal sensation triggered in the nervous system to alert you to possible injury, chronic pain is different. Pain signals persistently fire in the nervous system for weeks, months, even years. Chronic pain may have begun with an initial injury such as a sprained back or serious infection, or there may be an ongoing cause of pain such as arthritis or cancer, but some people have chronic pain in the absence of any past injury or evidence of body damage. Many chronic pain conditions affect older adults. Common chronic pain complaints include headache, low back pain, cancer pain, arthritis pain, neurogenic pain (pain resulting from damage to the peripheral nerves or to the central nervous system itself), and psychogenic pain (pain not due to past disease or injury or any visible sign of damage inside or outside the nervous system).

**Cleft lip and palate**

Cleft lip and cleft palate are facial birth defects. A cleft lip affects the upper lip, ranging from a notch to a complete fissure extending into the nose. A cleft palate affects the roof of the mouth, with a groove that may extend through the hard palate. These abnormalities may occur separately or together. Usually surgery is performed during infancy to correct them. There may be long-term speech problems as a result of this disorder.

**Cognitive disability**

Cognitive disability, also called intellectual disability, indicates below-average cognitive abilities. Signs of intellectual disability are failure to meet developmental milestones, decreased learning ability, persistent infantile behavior, lack of curiosity and inability to perform at school. There are all kinds of potential causes, such as infection (meningitis, congenital rubella), trauma (brain injury), chromosomal abnormalities (Down syndrome, fragile X syndrome), inherited conditions (Tay-Sachs disease, Rett syndrome) toxins (lead poisoning), metabolic disease (Reye’s syndrome), even malnutrition or poor social environment. However, a cause is identified in only a quarter of people with intellectual disability. This disability is sometimes referred to as mental retardation (not a preferred term), mental handicap or developmental handicap.

**Colostomy**

A colostomy is a surgical procedure to create an opening through the abdominal wall to remove solid waste from the body. It is performed for intestinal problems such as cancer of the colon and obstructive tumor’s. The surgery attaches the colon to an opening in the wall of the abdomen. The colon is emptied with a special collecting device. People with ostomies must learn about necessary dietary changes and how to clean and care for the stoma (abdominal opening) and its protective cover.

**Communication disability**

A communication disability is characterized by an inability to understand or use verbal language to communicate with others. This can mean problems with listening, speaking, reading or writing, difficulty pronouncing sounds and words, problems vocalizing, and stuttering.

**Complex regional pain syndrome**

Complex regional pain syndrome, or reflex sympathetic dystrophy syndrome, is a nerve disorder characterized by severe burning pain, pathological changes in bone and skin, excessive sweating, tissue swelling and extreme
sensitivity to touch. It occurs at the site of an injury (most often to the arms or legs), especially after injuries from high-velocity impacts such as those from bullets or shrapnel. However, it may occur without apparent injury. The pain that individuals report is out of proportion to the severity of the injury and gets worse, rather than better, over time. Eventually the joints become stiff from disuse, and the skin, muscles and bone atrophy. The symptoms of RSDS vary in severity and duration. The cause of RSDS is unknown. The disorder is unique in that it simultaneously affects the nerves, skin, muscles, blood vessels and bones.

Cooley's anemia
Beta Thalassemia major, or Cooley’s anemia, is a genetic blood disease that results in the failure to produce normal hemoglobin, the oxygen-carrying component of red blood cells. Thalassemia major is the most severe form of beta thalassemia in which the complete lack of beta protein in the hemoglobin causes a life-threatening anemia that requires regular blood transfusions and extensive ongoing medical care. These lifelong blood transfusions lead to iron overload, which must be treated with chelation therapy to prevent early death from organ failure.

Crohn's disease and colitis
Crohn’s disease is a chronic inflammatory disorder, primarily involving the small and large intestine, but which can affect other parts of the digestive system as well. The condition has many forms. In more serious cases, it can cause deep, large ulcers in the inner surface of the bowel, causing scarring and stiffness and possibly narrowing of the bowel, sometimes leading to obstruction. Deep ulcers can puncture holes in the bowel wall, leading to infection in the abdominal cavity and in adjacent organs. Symptoms of Crohn’s disease can include abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting, fever and weight loss, as well as reddish, tender skin nodules, and inflammation of the joints, spine, eyes and liver.

Cystic fibrosis
Cystic fibrosis is an incurable inherited disorder, involving mainly the lungs and the digestive system. It causes respiratory problems that become increasingly severe over time. In the digestive tract, CF often results in extreme difficulty in digesting adequate nutrients from food.

Deaf-blindness
Deaf blindness is the combination of vision and hearing disabilities (i.e. some mix of blindness, deafness, low vision and/or hearing loss). It is sometimes called dual sensory impairment. Most people who qualify as deafblind have some useful vision and/or hearing, which is very important to their daily functioning.

Deafness and hearing loss
Deafness is a disability that affects a person’s ability to hear. Deafness is a severe to profound hearing disability, with little or no residual hearing. Many deaf people communicate using sign language. People with hearing loss, often called hard of hearing, generally use their residual hearing and speech to communicate. Many people with hearing loss can understand some speech sounds with or without a hearing aid. Deafness can be the result of genetics, an accident, environmental factors or an illness.

Depression
Depression is a mental health disorder that may be characterized by sadness, fatigue, anorexia, lack of emotional expression, indifferent attitude and social withdrawal. Common types of depression are major depression, dysthymia and bipolar disorder. Some types of depression run in families.

Developmental disability
A developmental disability is any of several disorders that interrupt normal development in childhood. They may affect a single area of development (specific developmental disorders) or several (pervasive developmental disorders). Early intervention is of great benefit to children with developmental disabilities. Early intervention may include speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, behavior modification techniques, play therapy, and, in some cases, medication.

Diabetes
Diabetes is caused by decreased production of insulin in the body, or by decreased ability to use insulin. Insulin, a hormone produced by the pancreas, is needed to glucose into energy. Without it, the glucose piles up in the bloodstream and spills into the urine. Excessively high levels of sugar in the blood and the urine are the hallmarks
of untreated diabetes. Symptoms of diabetes include excessive thirst and urination, constant hunger, sudden weight loss, rapid and hard breathing, sudden vision changes or blurred vision, drowsiness or exhaustion, and a fruity odor on the breath. Diabetes is treated by controlling blood sugar levels and keeping them in the normal range. Complications of uncontrolled diabetes include heart and kidney disease, stroke, blindness and amputation.

**Down syndrome**

Down syndrome is a condition caused by an extra set of genes on chromosome 21. It results in some degree of intellectual disability and other developmental delays. Some of the physical traits that are common but not always present are epicanthal folds over the eyes, flattened bridge of the nose, a single palmar crease and decreased muscle tone. Heart abnormalities are present in about one-third all people with Down syndrome. There is also a higher incidence of eye disorders.

**Dwarfism**

Having short stature means being significantly below average in height (i.e. in the fifth percentile) compared to others of the same age and gender. It can be caused by a range of disorders such as achondroplasia (also known as dwarfism, although this is not a preferred term), Osteogenesis imperfecta (OI), Noonan syndrome and congenital hypothyroidism. However, short stature is not always caused by a medical condition -- sometimes it is simply your inherited height. People of short stature may benefit from adaptations to their home and workplace, such as lowered light switches and strategically placed stools.

**Dyslexia**

Dyslexia, a type of learning disability, is a reading disorder caused by the brain’s inability to process graphic symbols, or written material, properly. It is characterized by a reading level that is significantly lower than average compared to other people of similar age and intelligence. Thus, it greatly affects a person’s ability to learn. People with dyslexia benefit from modified teaching methods and educational environment. Other factors for success are early diagnosis of dyslexia, supportive family and friends and a strong self-image.

**Dystonia**

Dystonia is a neurological movement disorder characterized by involuntary muscle contractions that force certain parts of the body into abnormal, sometimes painful, movements or postures. These muscle contractions can interfere with normal function. Dystonia can affect any part of the body, including the arms and legs, trunk, neck, eyelids, face, or vocal cords. The symptoms of dystonia may have begun during childhood, in adolescence, or in adulthood. Generally, the earlier the onset of symptoms, the greater the chances are of progression of symptoms with age. Dystonia can exist on its own or as a result of birth injury, trauma, toxins or stroke.

**Ehlers-Danlos syndrome**

Ehlers-Danlos syndrome is an inherited disorder that causes easy bruising, loose joints, skin laxity and weakness of tissues. There are a number of different Ehlers-Danlos syndromes that share these features, but the syndrome is categorized into these types: classical, hypermobility, vascular, kyphoscoliosis, arthrochalsia, and dermatosparaxis. Ehlers-Danlos syndrome can affect mobility to the point where assistive devices such as wheelchairs are required.

**Environmental sensitivity**

Environmental sensitivity, also called environmental illness or multiple chemical sensitivity, is a chronic condition aggravated by exposure to petrochemicals in the environment, even at low levels that do not bother most people. These chemicals can include auto exhaust, perfumes, tobacco, detergents and other cleaning products. The chemicals might be in the air, water or food, and can be breathed, ingested or touched. Reactions range from mildly annoying to life-threatening. Common symptoms include headaches, dizziness, nausea, mental confusion, short-term memory loss, breathing problems, persistent flu-like symptoms, joint pains, muscle aches, depression and fatigue.

**Epilepsy/seizure disorder**

Epilepsy is a neurological disorder that from time to time produces brief disturbances in the normal electrical functions of the brain. Epilepsy is characterized by sudden, brief seizures whose nature and intensity vary from person to person. A seizure may appear as a brief stare, an unusual movement of the body, a change in
awareness, or a convulsion. A seizure may last a few seconds or a few minutes. Some people with epilepsy experience several seizures a day, while others may be seizure-free for months at a time.

**Facial difference**
A facial difference is any facial feature that varies significantly from the "norm." It can be present at birth; many disorders and syndromes such as Apert syndrome, cleft lip/palate, craniosynostosis or Noonan syndrome are characterized by specific facial characteristics. It can also be the result of illness or trauma that affects the face, such as third-degree burns. Support networks can be of great benefit to people with facial differences, who may struggle with self-esteem issues in a society that places great value on how we look.

**Fetal alcohol syndrome/effects**
Fetal alcohol syndrome is associated with drinking during pregnancy. Signs of the syndrome are lower than average weight/height, neurological effects such as hearing, developmental, behavioral and intellectual disorders, and facial characteristics (narrow eye openings, an elongated, flattened mid-face, a thin upper lip and an underdeveloped groove between the upper lip and the nose).

**Fibromyalgia**
Fibromyalgia is a syndrome that includes serious fatigue as well as chronic muscle pain and specific point tenderness, usually in association with sleep problems, fatigue, stiffness, headaches, facial pain, abdominal discomfort, irritable bladder, numbness or tingling, and problems thinking. The cause is not known, but physical therapy and other techniques may provide significant benefit and improve the quality of life.

**Friedreich's ataxia**
Friedreich's ataxia is an inherited condition that causes progressive damage to the nervous system, resulting in symptoms ranging from muscle weakness and speech problems to heart disease. Ataxia results from the degeneration of nerve tissue in the spinal cord and of nerves that control muscle movement in the arms and legs. Symptoms usually begin between the ages of 5 and 15. The first symptom is usually difficulty in walking. The ataxia gradually spreads to the arms and then the trunk. Most people with Friedreich's ataxia develop scoliosis of the spine which, if severe, may impair breathing.

**Genetic disease**
Genes are units of biological information that determine the development and function of the human body. Genetic variation among individuals is normal. However, mutations in the body's genes can result in genetic diseases. These mutations may be inherited from previous generations or occur in the cells of an individual's body. Many common diseases are associated with certain combinations of genes, but these are not generally considered genetic diseases. Nor are genetic predispositions that can result in disease if triggered by environmental factors.

**Glaucoma**
Glaucoma is a condition in which the fluid pressure inside the eyes rises because of slowed fluid drainage from the eye. Untreated, it may damage the optic nerve and other parts of the eye, causing significant vision loss or even blindness. Early detection is critical.

**Guillain-Barré syndrome**
Usually occurring after a respiratory infection, Guillain-Barré, syndrome is caused by a misdirected immune response that results in the direct destruction of the myelin sheath surrounding the peripheral nerves, or of the axon of the nerve itself. The syndrome sometimes follows other triggering events, such as vaccinations. It results in progressive symmetrical paralysis and loss of reflexes, usually beginning in the legs. In most cases there is nearly complete or complete recovery.

**Gulf war syndrome**
Gulf war syndrome describes a set of symptoms that are believed to be the direct health consequences of prolonged exposure to non-lethal levels of chemical and biological agents used in warfare. This link became widely suspected after soldiers who had fought in the 38-day Persian Gulf war in 1991 reported mysterious symptoms ranging from chronic fatigue to muscle and joint pain, memory loss and reproductive and gastrointestinal disorders.
**Head injury**
An acquired brain injury, sometimes called a head injury, is an injury to the brain that has occurred after birth -- not a congenital injury or an injury at the time of birth. Causes could include a car accident, a gunshot wound or a fall. An acquired brain injury may result in cognitive, speech-language, memory, physical or behavioral disabilities.

**Hearing loss**
People with hearing loss, often called hard of hearing, have some residual hearing, as opposed to being severely or profoundly deaf. People with hearing loss can understand some speech sounds with or without a hearing aid, use their residual hearing and speech to communicate. Their hearing loss can be the result of genetics, an accident, environmental factors or an illness.

**Heart disease**
Heart disease is a disease that affects the heart muscle or the blood vessels of the heart. Examples of heart disease include congenital heart disease, coronary artery disease, hypertension, heart tumour and heart valve pulmonary stenosis. In cases of heart disease, the circulatory needs of the body are not met during the normal range of activity. Heart disease can cause shortness of breath, often aggravated by activity, as well as fatigue, weakness and mental confusion.

**Hemophilia**
Hemophilia is a hereditary condition in which the blood does not clot normally. People with hemophilia do not bleed more profusely or more quickly than other people, but they do bleed for a longer time. They may experience internal hemorrhaging in joints, especially knees, ankles and elbows; and into tissues and muscles. When bleeding occurs in a vital organ, especially the brain, it can be life-threatening.

**Hepatitis C**
Hepatitis C is caused by a virus that is spread through direct contact with the blood of an infected person, for instance by using a contaminated needle. Chronic hepatitis C can lead to cirrhosis of the liver, and liver cancer. Symptoms of chronic hepatitis C, which may not appear for a long time after the initial infection, include fatigue, jaundice, nausea and hair loss. In more serious cases, loss of liver function may cause unresponsiveness, forgetfulness, trouble concentrating or trouble sleeping. A person can reduce the work the liver has to do by avoiding toxins such as alcohol, paint fumes and nicotine.

**HIV / AIDS**
HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is spread through sexual contact, blood (blood transfusions or needle sharing) and childbirth (mother to child). HIV attacks the immune system by gradually destroying the white blood cells that fight infection. The body loses its ability to defend itself from other opportunistic diseases. Symptoms of HIV, which may not show up for years after initial exposure, include fevers, sweats, chills, weakness and weight loss. Most individuals infected with HIV will progress to AIDS if not treated. AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) is the final and most serious stage of HIV disease.

**Huntington disease**
Huntington disease is a genetic disease which effects a person’s mental and physical abilities. These effects are caused by the loss of neurons (nerve cells) in the brain. Symptoms include mania, depression, extreme irritability, psychosis, restlessness, wiggling, turning movements, muscle stiffness, slow movement and trouble with memory and other mental processes. There is no cure for Huntington’s disease, but medication can control symptoms such as mood swings and chorea.

**Hydrocephalus**
Hydrocephalus is a condition that often accompanies spina bifida, a neural tube defect in which the spine does not form completely. It occurs during the first four weeks of pregnancy. The defect may leave the spinal cord exposed, which usually results in some damage to it at the point of exposure. This limits the brain signals travelling to and from parts of the body below the point where the damage has occurred. The effects from Spina bifida are extremely varied, ranging from significant physical and intellectual disability to minor bladder problems correctable by surgery. The most common effects are limited use of lower limbs, bowel and bladder limitations, and average intelligence.
**Hyperactivity**

Attention deficit disorder (ADD), or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), is a neurobiological condition and a learning disability. Its characteristics include lack of concentration, impulsiveness, and sometimes hyperactivity. The symptoms vary in intensity depending on the individual. Children with ADD often have problems at school because they are required to sit still and pay attention for long periods of time -- two activities with which they may have difficulty. Many adults have learned special strategies to cope with ADD.

**Hyperlexia**

Hyperlexia causes significant difficulty in understanding verbal language. Children with Hyperlexia also have a precocious ability to read words -- far above what would be expected at their age -- or an intense fascination with letters or numbers. People with Hyperlexia may have difficulty with social skills. Other characteristics include rarely initiating conversations, an intense need to keep routines, difficulty with transitions, ritualistic behavior, auditory, olfactory and/or tactile sensitivity, strong auditory and visual memory, difficulty with abstract concepts, and selective listening.

**Ileostomy**

An ileostomy is a surgical procedure to create an opening through the abdominal wall to remove waste from the body. It is required when the large intestine and rectum must be removed due to disease or abnormality. The surgery connects the small intestine to an opening in the wall of the abdomen. The opening becomes an artificial anus for expelling solid waste. A disposable bag is worn continuously to collect the semiliquid waste. People with ostomies must learn about necessary dietary changes and how to clean and care for the stoma (abdominal opening) and its protective cover.

**Inflammatory bowel disease**

Inflammatory bowel disease refers to a group of chronic conditions that cause inflammation of the bowel -- the small or large intestine. The most common types of inflammatory bowel disease are ulcerative colitis and Crohn’s disease. The portion of the intestine affected by inflammatory bowel disease becomes irritated and swollen. Ulcers may form. The symptoms of inflammatory bowel disease include abdominal pain and diarrhea. Symptoms tend to wax and wane, with long remissions and even the spontaneous resolution of symptoms possible.

**Intellectual disability**

Someone with an intellectual disability has below-average cognitive abilities. Signs of intellectual disability are failure to meet developmental milestones, decreased learning ability, persistent infantile behavior, lack of curiosity and inability to perform at school. There are all kinds of potential causes, such as infection (meningitis, congenital rubella), trauma (brain injury), chromosomal abnormalities (Down syndrome, fragile X syndrome), inherited conditions (Tay-Sachs disease, Rett syndrome) toxins (lead poisoning), metabolic disease (Reye’s syndrome), even malnutrition or poor social environment. However, a cause is identified in only a quarter of people with intellectual disability. This disability is sometimes referred to as mental retardation (not a preferred term), mental handicap or developmental handicap.

**Juvenile arthritis**

Any type of arthritis (a condition involving joint and musculoskeletal pain usually caused by inflammation of the joint lining) that develops before the age of 16 is considered juvenile arthritis. Within this broad category are many different types of arthritis, such as juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, Still’s disease, lupus and scleroderma. Symptoms can vary, but some of the most common are pain, redness and swelling in the joints, fatigue, rash, fever, morning stiffness, flu-like feeling, weight loss and nausea. Nodules or lumps under the skin may form with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis.

**Juvenile diabetes**

Juvenile diabetes, or Type 1 diabetes, can affect people of all ages. It is caused by decreased production of insulin in the body. Insulin, a hormone produced by the pancreas, is needed to glucose into energy. Without it, the glucose piles up in the bloodstream and spills into the urine. Excessively high levels of sugar in the blood and the urine are the hallmarks of untreated diabetes. Symptoms of diabetes include excessive thirst and urination, constant hunger, sudden weight loss, rapid and hard breathing, sudden vision changes or blurred vision, drowsiness or exhaustion, and a fruity odor on the breath. Diabetes is treated by controlling blood sugar levels
and keeping them in the normal range (e.g. by administering insulin and restricting dietary sugar). Complications of uncontrolled diabetes include heart and kidney disease, stroke, blindness and amputation.

**Kidney disease**
Kidney disease is any disease or disorder that affects the function of the kidneys, such as chronic kidney failure, congenital nephrotic syndrome, Good pastures’s syndrome, lupus nephritis or renal disorders. The kidneys are responsible for excreting wastes, concentrating urine and conserving electrolytes. Chronic renal failure results in fluid and waste products accumulating in the body. Initial symptoms of kidney problems include weight loss, nausea, a general ill feeling, fatigue, headaches, frequent hiccups and generalized itching.

**Laryngectomy**
Surgery to remove part or all of the larynx is a partial or total laryngectomy. In either operation, the surgeon performs a tracheostomy, creating an opening (called a stoma) in the front of the neck. Air enters and leaves the trachea and lungs through this opening. A tracheostomy tube keeps the new airway open. In a total laryngectomy, the surgeon removes the entire voice box, and the stoma is kept permanently. The individual breathes through the stoma and must learn to talk in a new way.

**Learning disability**
A learning disability is as a central nervous system dysfunction that interferes with the brain’s capacity to process information in the conventional manner. People with learning disabilities have a disorder in one or more of the basic processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. They may have difficulties in listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling or arithmetic. The primary cause of the disorder is not due to visual, hearing, intellectual or physical disabilities, emotional disturbance or environmental disadvantages. Examples of learning disabilities include attention deficit disorder and dyslexia.

**Leprosy**
Leprosy is an infectious disease caused by Mycobacterium leprae, a type of bacteria. Most people have a natural immunity to leprosy. In those who don’t, the disease mainly affects nerves that lie near the skin. If untreated, this can cause a loss of feeling in the affected parts of the body (usually the hands, feet, eyes or face). It can also lead to partial paralysis and an inability to blink, which can eventually cause blindness. However, modern drug treatment can cure leprosy.

**Low vision**
A person is considered to have low vision if they have some useful vision, but cannot achieve clear vision by wearing glasses or contact lenses. Low vision generally means a person’s vision does not meet their needs. They may be able to improve it somewhat with visual devices such as computer screen enlargers.

**Lung disease**
Lung disease, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), refers to a number of disorders that obstruct the airways. Examples include chronic bronchitis, emphysema and pulmonary fibrosis. The main symptom of lung disease is shortness of breath, accompanied by a cough or wheezing, sometimes brought on by exertion.

**Lupus**
Lupus is the name of a group of chronic autoimmune diseases. The most common and serious of these is called systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), in which the body’s immune system stops working properly and attacks healthy tissues, causing inflammation. Inflammation can happen in the skin, muscles or joints. The heart, lungs, kidneys, blood vessels or the nervous system can also be attacked by the immune system. There may be exacerbations and then periods of remission.

**Lymphovenous disorder**
Our lymphatic system is responsible for pumping lymph fluid throughout our bodies. When the flow of this fluid is interrupted or impaired due to a lymphovenous disorder (such as Klippel-Trenaunay syndrome or lymphedema), swelling of the tissues and other problems can result. Individuals may be born with lymphovenous conditions, or develop these conditions and have them diagnosed later in life. Some individuals may acquire lymphovenous disorders as a result of: the surgical removal of lymph nodes; radiation damage to the nodes and lymphatic vessels following cancer treatment; trauma; or parasitic infiltration of the lymph nodes and vessels.
**Manic depression**

Bipolar disorder, formerly called manic-depression, is not as common as other forms of depressive disorders. Bipolar disorder involves cycles of depression and elation or mania. Sometimes the mood switches are dramatic and rapid, but most often they are gradual. When in the depressed cycle, a person can have any or all of the symptoms of a depressive disorder. When manic, a person’s thinking, judgment and social behavior can be affected in ways that cause serious problems and embarrassment, for instance he or she might make unwise business or financial decisions. Bipolar disorder is often a chronic, recurring condition.

**Marfan syndrome**

Marfan syndrome is an inherited disorder of the connective tissues. Connective tissue "connects," provides structural support, and determines the elasticity of the body’s organs, bones, and ligaments. In Marfan syndrome, the connective tissue in the heart, lungs, eyes and skeletal systems can stretch and weaken. The most serious problems associated with this syndrome involve the cardiovascular system and can lead to heart failure. Someone with Marfan syndrome may also have curvature of the spine, an abnormally shaped chest, tall stature, loose jointedness and nearsightedness.

**Mental health disability**

Mental health disability, also called psychiatric disability or mental illness, covers a broad range of disorders. It is generally considered a disability when it interferes with someone’s ability to cope or function on a day-to-day basis, or causes behavior that becomes a concern for others. However, many people find ways of managing their mental health disabilities and are able to lead fulfilling and active lives. A mental health disability can be organic (resulting directly from an identifiable brain malfunction) or functional (not explained by a simple structural abnormality of the brain). It can be a neurosis (e.g. one of various forms of anxiety and depression that can be regarded as severe forms of normal experiences), a psychosis (involving distortion of a person’s perception of reality, often accompanied by delusions and/or hallucinations), or a personality disorder, or there can be some overlap across these types (e.g. post-traumatic stress disorder).

**Mental retardation**

An intellectual disability (a term preferred over mental retardation) indicates below-average cognitive abilities. Signs of intellectual disability are failure to meet developmental milestones, decreased learning ability, persistent infantile behavior, lack of curiosity and inability to perform at school. There are all kinds of potential causes, such as infection (meningitis, congenital rubella), trauma (brain injury), chromosomal abnormalities (Down syndrome, fragile X syndrome), inherited conditions (Tay-Sachs disease, Rett syndrome) toxins (lead poisoning), metabolic disease (Reye’s syndrome), even malnutrition or poor social environment. However, a cause is identified in only a quarter of people with intellectual disability.

**Metabolic disorder**

A metabolic disorder is any problem in the body that causes loss of metabolic control of the body’s steady state, i.e. interfering with how food is built up or broken down in the body to keep the body healthy. Inborn errors of metabolism cause hundreds of different diseases. Each disease is a block in changing one chemical to another. The impact on the individual varies widely. Some disorders have no symptoms, while others cause very noticeable disabilities. Most metabolic disorders are inherited, and are diagnosed well before adulthood. Some disorders include adreno-leukodystrophy, Prader-Willi syndrome and Reye’s syndrome.

**Migraines and chronic headaches**

A vascular headache is a group of headaches thought to involve abnormal sensitivity of the blood vessels in the brain to various triggers, resulting in rapid changes in the artery size due to spasm. Other arteries in the brain and scalp then dilate, and throbbing pain is perceived in the head. Migraines, which are thought to be inherited, are the most common type of vascular headache. Migraines can be accompanied by other sensory phenomena that indicate a brain malfunction, such as flashing lights, blurred/double vision, balance problems, numbness, weakness, hearing problems or difficulty speaking. Severe migraine headaches can be totally disabling, but once they pass they may have no impact on a person’s normal state of health. They can last from a few hours to several days.
**Mucopolysaccharide disease**

Mucopolysaccharide diseases, often referred to as MPS I-VII, are rare, progressive, inherited metabolic diseases involving Mucopolysaccharide -- long molecular chains of sugar used by the body in the building of connective tissues. Children born with a Mucopolysaccharide or related disease are unable to produce one of the enzymes essential for this process. If even one enzyme is missing, used materials cannot be broken down, and instead remain stored in the cells of the body. Babies may show no sign of the disease, but as more and more cells become damaged by the storage of used material, symptoms begin to appear. Depending on the specific disease, effects may include restricted growth and progressive intellectual and/or physical disability.

**Multiple chemical sensitivity**

Multiple chemical sensitivity, also called environmental illness, is a chronic condition aggravated by exposure to petrochemicals in the environment, even at low levels that do not bother most people. These chemicals can include auto exhaust, perfumes, tobacco, detergents and other cleaning products. The chemicals might be in the air, water or food, and can be breathed, ingested or touched. Reactions range from mildly annoying to life-threatening. Common symptoms include headaches, dizziness, nausea, mental confusion, short-term memory loss, breathing problems, persistent flu-like symptoms, joint pains, muscle aches, depression and fatigue.

**Multiple sclerosis**

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an unpredictable disease of the central nervous system -- the brain and spinal cord. The disease attacks the protective myelin covering of the central nervous system, causing inflammation and often destroying the myelin in patches. The severity of MS, progression and specific symptoms cannot be predicted at the time of diagnosis and vary widely from person to person. Initial symptoms can include blurred/double vision, tingling, dizziness, loss of coordination or numbness. While MS can eventually cause mobility or other disabilities, for most people it will be many years before they may require even a cane on a regular basis.

**Musculoskeletal pain**

Musculoskeletal disorders are the second most common complaint encountered in general medical practice. The most common disorders are spinal pain (neck, thoracic and low back pain), sporting injuries, particularly of the lower limb, and overuse injuries such as tennis elbow, plantar fasciitis, Achilles tendinitis and tenosynovitis of tendons to the hand. Posture, physical and emotional stress, cigarette smoking, poor exercise and nutritional habits, caffeine consumption and a history of trauma can all contribute to musculoskeletal pain.

**Myalgic encephalomyelitis**

Myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) is an emerging condition characterized by debilitating fatigue (experienced as exhaustion and extremely poor stamina), neurological problems, and a variety of flu-like symptoms. It is also known as chronic fatigue syndrome and chronic fatigue immune dysfunction syndrome. The core symptoms include excessive fatigue, general pain, mental fogginess, and often gastrointestinal problems. Many other symptoms may also be present; however, they will typically be different among individuals. These include: fatigue following stressful activities; headaches; sore throat; sleep disorders; and abnormal temperature. The degree of severity can differ widely among individuals, and will also vary over time for the same person. This variation, in addition to the fact that the cause of the disease is not yet known, makes this syndrome difficult to diagnose.

**Myasthenia gravis**

Myasthenia gravis (MG) is a chronic neuromuscular disorder characterized by varying degrees of weakness of the skeletal or voluntary muscles of the body. The muscle weakness increases during periods of activity and improves after periods of rest. MG most commonly occurs in young adult women and older men but can occur at any age. Although MG may affect any voluntary muscle, certain muscles -- including those that control eye movements, eyelids, chewing, swallowing, coughing and facial expressions -- are more often affected. Weakness may also occur in the muscles that control breathing and arm and leg movements. The muscles involved in MG vary from one individual to the next.

**Myelin disease**

Myelin disease is any disorder or disease that causes damage to body’s myelin, the protective sheath covering the nerves. Many acquired diseases or inherited metabolic disorders attack the myelin. They include, for instance, multiple sclerosis, leukodystrophy, Guillain-Barré syndrome and Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease. Myelin disease can affect vision, hearing, balance, speech, mobility and memory.
**M'nîŠre's disease**

M'nîŠre's disease is a disorder of the inner ear, in which there is swelling in part of the ear canal. It is characterized by vertigo, hearing loss in one or both ears, and noises or ringing in the ear (tinnitus). There may also be profuse sweating, uncontrollable eye movements and nausea or vomiting. The exact cause is unknown, but might be related to ear infection, head injury, respiratory infection, stress, and use of alcohol or pharmaceuticals.

**Neurofibromatosis**

Neurofibromatosis (NF) is a genetic disorder of the nervous system that causes tumors to form on the nerves anywhere in the body at any time. It is a progressive disorder. The effects are unpredictable and have varying manifestations and degrees of severity. Symptoms may include deafness, unsteady gait, vertigo, blindness, pain, ringing in the ears, convulsions, and mild intellectual impairment. There is no known cure or treatment, other than the surgical removal of tumors, which may sometimes grow back.

**Neurological disability**

Neurological disabilities are those associated with damage to the nervous system (brain and spine) that results in the loss of some bodily or mental functions. The most common is probably acquired brain injury. Heart attacks, infections and lack of oxygen to the brain may also result in a neurological disability. Neurological disabilities may affect a person’s mobility or physical abilities. They may also affect the way a person acts, expresses feelings, thinks or processes information.

**Neuromuscular disability**

Neuromuscular disabilities include over 50 disorders that affect the body’s "motor unit" (nerve and muscles). Some are disorders of the motor nerve cell, others of the nerve, and still others of the muscle. This group of disabilities includes spinal muscular atrophy, myasthenia gravis and muscular dystrophy. The most common symptoms experienced are varying degrees of progressive muscle weakness and wasting.

**Obsessive compulsive disorder**

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is a neurobiological disability, classified as an anxiety disorder. It causes recurrent, intrusive thoughts (obsessions) that provoke anxiety or discomfort. The person may perform ritualistic behaviors (compulsions) to neutralize the discomfort, although the relief is only temporary. The person realizes that the obsessions are a product of his or her own mind and that the compulsions are unreasonable. Until OCD becomes moderate to severe, the compulsions are often done secretively or are well disguised. Generally, the person feels that he or she is going crazy and fears telling others about it. OCD can be associated with other disabilities such as Tourette syndrome, attention deficit disorder, panic disorder, learning disabilities and schizophrenia.

**Occupational injury or disease**

Occupational injury and occupational disease are health problems brought on by conditions in the workplace. There is a wide variety of injuries and diseases experienced by workers from many different occupational fields. Examples include: traumatic injuries, such as an accident with heavy or motorized equipment that results in spinal cord injury or amputation; back pain or injury that progresses over time; hearing loss caused by working with noisy machinery; and asthma brought on by exposure to airborne pollutants such as grain dust or animal proteins.

**Osteogenesis imperfecta**

Osteogenesis imperfecta (OI), also called brittle bone disease, is a genetic disorder characterized by bones that break easily, often from little or no apparent cause. There are four major types of OI, all of them affecting the body’s production of collagen, the major protein of the body’s connective tissue, and thus weakening the bones. Besides having bones predisposed to fracture, someone with OI might have spinal curvature, short stature, hearing loss, certain facial characteristics including a triangular face, loose joints and poor muscle development in arms and legs. Features of OI vary greatly from person to person -- even among people with the same type of OI, and even within the same family.

**Osteoporosis**

Osteoporosis is a disorder of the bones characterized by a progressive loss of bone tissue, with resulting in the bone becoming thin and brittle. It increases the risk of bone fractures occurring with only a minor fall or injury.
The bones in the wrist, hip and spine are most often affected by osteoporosis. Over time, the bones in the spine can collapse (compression fractures), resulting in a person becoming shorter. Osteoporosis can also cause a person to stoop forward and appear to have a hump on his or her spine. Hip fractures can lead to immobility and hospitalization.

**Ostomy**

Both an ileostomy and colostomy are surgical procedures to create an opening through the abdominal wall to remove solid waste from the body. A colostomy attaches the colon to an opening in the wall of the abdomen. It is performed for intestinal problems such as cancer of the colon and obstructive tumors. The colon is emptied with a special collecting device. An ileostomy connects the small intestine to an opening in the wall of the abdomen. It is required when the large intestine and rectum must be removed due to disease or abnormality. The opening becomes an artificial anus for expelling solid waste. A disposable bag is worn continuously to collect the semiliquid waste. People with ostomies must learn about necessary dietary changes and how to clean and care for the stoma (abdominal opening) and its protective cover.

**Pain**

While acute pain is a normal sensation triggered in the nervous system to alert you to possible injury, chronic pain is different. Pain signals persistently fire in the nervous system for weeks, months, even years. Chronic pain may have begun with an initial injury such as a sprained back or serious infection, or there may be an ongoing cause of pain such as arthritis or cancer, but some people have chronic pain in the absence of any past injury or evidence of body damage. Many chronic pain conditions affect older adults. Common chronic pain complaints include headache, low back pain, cancer pain, arthritis pain, neurogenic pain (pain resulting from damage to the peripheral nerves or to the central nervous system itself), and psychogenic pain (pain not due to past disease or injury or any visible sign of damage inside or outside the nervous system).

**Parkinson's disease**

Parkinson’s disease results when the brain no longer produces enough of a substance called dopamine, which is necessary for movement. It does not only occur in older people; the average age of diagnosis is 56. Parkinson’s has many symptoms, which vary from person to person. They include: tremor (shaking) in the extremities, especially the hands, while at rest; difficulty and slowness of movement; and rigidity. Other early symptoms are fatigue, lost or diminished sense of smell, oily face, difficulty turning over in bed, a stooped posture, difficulty walking or getting out of a chair, small, constrained handwriting, soft voice, constipation, decreased arm swing while walking, drooling and insomnia.

**Polio and post-polio syndrome**

Poliomyelitis (polio), also called infantile paralysis, is caused by a viral infection (poliovirus) that affects the whole body, including muscles and nerves. Polio immunization now prevents polio in most North Americans. However, many adults are still living with the effects of polio contracted in childhood, such as weakness or paralysis in the limbs, or in the muscles controlling speech, swallowing and breathing. In addition, many individuals who thought they were fully recovered from polio are, decades later, experiencing progressive symptoms such as muscle weakness and fatigue. This is post-polio syndrome.

**Prader-Willi syndrome**

Prader-Willi syndrome is a chromosomal disorder that may be noticeable at birth -- new infants are often small and very floppy (hypotonic). As the children grow they may have delayed motor and mental development (IQ is usually less than 80), and small hands and feet. They also become increasingly obese due to an intense craving for food -- they will do almost anything to get it. Children with Prader-Willi syndrome tend to be very happy and pleasant to be around.

**Psychiatric disability**

Mental health disability, also called psychiatric disability or mental illness, covers a broad range of disorders. It is generally considered a disability when it interferes with someone’s ability to cope or function on a day-to-day basis, or causes behavior that becomes a concern for others. However, many people find ways of managing their mental health disabilities and are able to lead fulfilling and active lives. A mental health disability can be organic (resulting directly from an identifiable brain malfunction) or functional (not explained by a simple structural abnormality of the brain). It can be a neurosis (e.g. one of various forms of anxiety and depression that can be regarded as severe forms of normal experiences), a psychosis (involving distortion of a person’s perception of
reality, often accompanied by delusions and/or hallucinations), or a personality disorder, or there can be some overlap across these types (e.g. post-traumatic stress disorder).

**Reflex sympathetic dystrophy syndrome**
Reflex sympathetic dystrophy syndrome, or complex regional pain syndrome, is a nerve disorder characterized by severe burning pain, pathological changes in bone and skin, excessive sweating, tissue swelling and extreme sensitivity to touch. It occurs at the site of an injury (most often to the arms or legs), especially after injuries from high-velocity impacts such as those from bullets or shrapnel. However, it may occur without apparent injury. The pain that individuals report is out of proportion to the severity of the injury and gets worse, rather than better, over time. Eventually the joints become stiff from disuse, and the skin, muscles and bone atrophy. The symptoms of RSDS vary in severity and duration. The cause of RSDS is unknown. The disorder is unique in that it simultaneously affects the nerves, skin, muscles, blood vessels and bones.

**Retinitis pigmentosa**
Retinitis pigmentosa (RP) is a progressive degeneration of the retina that affects night vision and peripheral vision. The cause is unknown, but it may be inherited. As the disease progresses, peripheral vision is lost as well and may lead to blindness. Signs and symptoms often first appear in childhood, but significant visual disability does not develop until early adulthood.

**Rett syndrome**
Rett syndrome is a neurological disorder occurring primarily in girls, in which individuals exhibit reduced muscle tone, autistic-like behavior, wringing and waving of the hands, loss of purposeful use of the hands, diminished ability to express feelings, avoidance of eye contact, a lag in brain and head growth, gait abnormalities and seizures. Girls with Rett syndrome seem to develop normally until six to 18 months of age and then regress, losing speech and hand skills. Loss of muscle tone is usually the first symptom. Most researchers agree that RS is a developmental disorder rather than a progressive, degenerative disorder. Intellectual development appears to be significantly affected by Rett syndrome, but IQ is difficult to measure.

**Schizophrenia**
Schizophrenia is a biological brain disorder that affects thinking, perception, mood and behavior. Symptoms include disorganized thinking, delusions, hallucinations, changes in emotions and changes in behavior. Schizophrenia is not the same as split or multiple personality. It generally appears in a person’s late teens or early 20s. People with schizophrenia may have isolated or recurring psychotic episodes (when they’re out of touch with reality). Usually a person with ongoing schizophrenia requires long-term treatment, generally including medication, to control the symptoms.

**Scleroderma**
The word scleroderma means "hard skin." The most characteristic feature of scleroderma is the build-up of tough, scar-like fibrous tissue in the skin. There are two main types of scleroderma: localized scleroderma, which affects mainly the skin but can also involve the muscles and joints; and generalized scleroderma, which affects the skin as well as the internal organs, such as the heart, lungs and kidneys. Scleroderma can cause damage to the cells lining the walls of small blood vessels, which may in turn damage major organs. Not all forms of scleroderma are progressive.

**Seizure disorder**
Epilepsy/seizure disorders are neurological disorders that from time to time produce brief disturbances in the normal electrical functions of the brain. Epilepsy is characterized by sudden, brief seizures whose nature and intensity vary from person to person. A seizure may appear as a brief stare, an unusual movement of the body, a change in awareness, or a convulsion. A seizure may last a few seconds or a few minutes. Some people with epilepsy experience several seizures a day, while others may be seizure-free for months at a time.

**Short stature**
Having short stature means being significantly below average in height (i.e. in the fifth percentile) compared to others of the same age and gender. It can be caused by a range of disorders such as achondroplasia (also known as dwarfism, although this is not a preferred term), Osteogenesis imperfecta (OI), Noonan syndrome and congenital hypothyroidism. However, short stature is not always caused by a medical condition -- sometimes it is
simply your inherited height. People of short stature may require adaptations to their home and workplace, such as lowered light switches and strategically placed stools.

**Sickle cell anemia**
Sickle cell disease is a disorder of the blood caused by an inherited abnormal hemoglobin (an oxygen-carrying protein within the red blood cells). The abnormal hemoglobin causes distorted (sickle-shaped) red blood cells. The sickled red blood cells are fragile and prone to rupture. When the number of red blood cells decreases from rupture (hemolysis), anemia is the result. This condition is referred to as sickle cell anemia. The irregular sickled cells can also block blood vessels, causing tissue and organ damage and pain.

**Sjögren syndrome**
Sjögren syndrome is a chronic disorder that causes damage to the salivary glands, resulting in dry mouth, and the tear glands, resulting in dry eyes. It can also affect other parts of the body, including joints, muscles and nerves, and organs such as the lungs, kidneys, liver, pancreas, stomach and brain. It may affect the thyroid gland, as well as any other of the body’s glands that help produce sweat, saliva or oil. In secondary Sjögren syndrome, it is associated with people who have a rheumatic condition or connective tissue disease such as lupus or scleroderma or polymyositis.

**Spasmodic dysphonia**
Spasmodic dysphonia (or laryngeal dystonia) is a voice disorder caused by involuntary movements of one or more muscles of the larynx, or voice box. Individuals may have occasional difficulty saying a word or two, or they may experience sufficient difficulty to interfere with communication. Spasmodic dysphonia causes the voice to break or to have a tight, strained or strangled quality. The spasms are usually absent while laughing or singing. Stress often makes the muscle spasms more severe. The cause of spasmodic dysphonia is unknown, but is thought to run in families in some cases. Sometimes the condition follows an upper respiratory infection, injury to the larynx, a long period of voice use, or stress.

**Speech/language disability**
A speech/language disability, also called a communication disability, is characterized by an inability to understand or use verbal language to communicate with others. This can mean problems with listening, speaking, reading or writing, difficulty pronouncing sounds and words, problems vocalizing, and stuttering.

**Spina bifida and hydrocephalus**
Spina bifida is a neural tube defect in which the spine does not form completely. It occurs during the first four weeks of pregnancy. The defect may leave the spinal cord exposed, which usually results in some damage to it at the point of exposure. This limits the brain signals travelling to and from parts of the body below the point where the damage has occurred. The effects from spina bifida are extremely varied, ranging from significant physical and intellectual disability to minor bladder problems correctable by surgery. The most common effects are limited use of lower limbs, bowel and bladder limitations, and average intelligence. Spina bifida is usually accompanied by one or more other conditions, such as hydrocephalus.

**Spinal cord injury**
A spinal cord injury occurs from trauma such as a fall, a gunshot wound or a car accident. When a person receives a spinal cord injury, messages can’t get from the brain to parts of the body below the site of injury, and vice versa. Spinal cord injuries can occur at any level of the spinal cord, and the level of the injury will dictate which bodily functions are altered or lost. The higher the injury, the more of the body that is affected. A spinal cord injury is usually identified according to the particular vertebrae where the trauma occurred (e.g. a C5-6 injury means it occurred between the fifth and sixth cervical vertebrae). A spinal cord injury can be complete (no messages get through) or partial (there may be some movement, feeling or mobility below the level of injury).

**Stroke**
A stroke is an injury to a part of the brain that occurs when the blood flow to the brain is interrupted for some reason. When an artery to the brain becomes blocked or bursts, blood supply is cut off, and the brain does not get the oxygen and nutrients it needs. Permanent damage will result if the blood supply is cut off for more than a few hours. When part of the brain is damaged, the part of the body controlled by the injured area is affected too; for example, a person’s arm and leg may become paralyzed on one side of the body, or he or she may have difficulty speaking.
**Sturge-Weber syndrome**

Sturge-Weber syndrome is a rare, congenital and progressive condition that affects the skin and the brain. Characteristically, a large pink to purple haemangioma (a birthmark caused by abnormal distribution of blood vessels) extends over one side of the face, including the eye. A similar malformation of blood vessels in the brain may cause some degree of weakness on the opposite side of the body, glaucoma and epilepsy. In some cases, strokes may occur.

**Stuttering**

Stuttering is a communication disorder of fluency -- the smoothness with which sounds, syllables, words and phrases are joined together during oral language. In stuttering, the flow of speech is broken by abnormal stoppage with no sound, repetitions of sounds or syllables, or prolonging of a sound or syllable. There may also be unusual facial and body movements associated with the effort to speak. Stuttering tends to run in families and evidence suggests it is associated with a neurological disorder. People often don’t stutter when singing, talking to animals, reading to children or talking to themselves.

**Thalassemia major**

Beta Thalassemia major, or Cooley’s anemia, is a genetic blood disease that results in the failure to produce normal haemoglobin, the oxygen-carrying component of red blood cells. Thalassemia major is the most severe form of beta thalassemia in which the complete lack of beta protein in the haemoglobin causes a life-threatening anemia that requires regular blood transfusions and extensive ongoing medical care. These lifelong blood transfusions lead to iron overload, which must be treated with chelation therapy to prevent early death from organ failure.

**Thalidomide-related disability**

Thalidomide, a drug introduced in 1957 in West Germany, was often prescribed to pregnant women for morning sickness. However, it interfered with the proper growth of the fetus (especially when at during a specific point in the first trimester), causing birth defects in thousands of children around the world. Those babies (now adults) who survived had birth defects such as foreshortened arms and legs, missing fingers and toes, deafness, blindness, cleft palate and many other internal disabilities.

**Tinnitus**

Tinnitus is a ringing, swishing or other type of noise that seems to originate in the ear or head. It is a symptom of an underlying condition, such as Mènière’s disease. Usually only the individual can hear the noise. In many cases it is only a minor nuisance that eventually goes away. But persistent tinnitus, which can cause distress, is often triggered or made worse by depression, anxiety, accident and injury (not necessarily to the ear) or retirement. Tinnitus appears to be twice as common in people with hearing loss, perhaps because straining to hear teaches the subconscious brain to pick up anything coming from the inner ear. It may amplify normal background noise in the hearing system, rather than suppress it as most people do.

**Tourette syndrome**

Tourette syndrome is an inherited disorder of the nervous system characterized by repeated repetitive muscle movements and vocal outbursts called tics. It becomes apparent during childhood or adolescence. The tics can include eye blinking, repeated throat clearing or sniffing, arm thrusting, kicking movements, shoulder shrugging or jumping. Only in a small number of cases do tics involve socially inappropriate words or phrases. People with Tourette syndrome explain that the tics are not totally involuntary, but things wouldn’t "feel right" if they did not do them.

**Traumatic brain injury**

Also called an acquired brain injury, this is an injury to the brain that has occurred after birth -- not a congenital injury or an injury at the time of birth. Causes could include a car accident, a gunshot wound or a fall. An acquired brain injury may result in cognitive, speech-language, memory, physical or behavioral disabilities.

**Tuberous sclerosis**

Tuberous sclerosis (TS) is a rare genetic disorder that causes benign tumors to form in many different organs -- primarily in the brain, eyes, heart, kidney, skin, and lungs. It is often first recognized in children from two
neurological symptoms -- seizures (most often beginning in the first year of life) and/or varying degrees of intellectual disability. However, the symptoms of TS vary greatly and may often not appear until later in life. There is currently no cure, and there is no way to predict how severely or mildly an individual may be affected by TS.

**Turner syndrome**

Turner syndrome is a chromosome disorder in which the individual, rather than having one X and one Y chromosome (male) or two X chromosomes (female), has only one X chromosome in each of her cells. She appears female but her sexual development is inhibited and she is infertile. The other main characteristics of Turner syndrome are short stature, narrowing of the aorta, webbing of the skin of the neck, and abnormalities of the eyes and bones.

**Ventilator user**

A mechanical ventilator is a machine that helps a person breathe. It is a lifesaving device for a person whose disability interferes with his or her ability to breathe independently. Ventilator users might include people with high-level spinal cord injuries, polio survivors, or people with neuromuscular disorders (such as muscular dystrophy or ALS) that interfere with the muscles used to breathe. A ventilator has now become an everyday piece of home medical equipment that opens the doors to infinite possibilities for vent users.

**Visual impairment**

Blindness and low vision (also called visual impairment, not a preferred term) affect a person’s eyesight. Normal vision is 20/20. Someone who is legally blind has 20/200 vision or worse. Eighty per cent of blind people have some vision, such as light perception. People who have some useful vision, but who cannot achieve clear vision by wearing glasses or contact lenses, are considered to have low vision. Low vision generally means a person’s vision does not meet their needs. They may be able to improve it somewhat with visual devices such as computer screen enlargers.

**Williams syndrome**

Williams syndrome is a genetic disorder that almost always causes some degree of intellectual and developmental disability. There is usually some type of heart or blood vessel problem as well, and a few other medical issues that require monitoring. Williams syndrome is associated with facial features that become more apparent with age. Young children with Williams syndrome often have low muscle tone and joint laxity, and they may develop stiffness in the joints as they get older (physical therapy helps to diminish these effects). People with Williams syndrome tend to have a unique strength in their expressive language skills, and are typically polite, sociable and likeable. Older children and adults with Williams syndrome often demonstrate intellectual "strengths and weaknesses." There are some intellectual areas (such as speech, long-term memory, and social skills) in which performance is quite strong, while other intellectual areas (such as fine motor and spatial relations) are significantly deficient.

**Work injury**

Occupational injury (work injury) and occupational disease are health problems brought on by conditions in the workplace. There is a wide variety of injuries and diseases experienced by workers from many different occupational fields. Examples include: traumatic injuries, such as an accident with heavy or motorized equipment that results in spinal cord injury or amputation; back pain or injury that progresses over time; hearing loss caused by working with noisy machinery; and asthma brought on by exposure to airborne pollutants such as grain dust or animal proteins.