

Educational Implications

They face physical, academic and social challenges. Fatigue plays a big part in the student's school day. Learning disabilities are more prevalent in some neuromuscular diseases, but most students with these diseases have the normal range of intelligence. Students may need alternative methods (besides written work) of demonstrating academic comprehension. With imagination, almost any activity can be adapted to be accessible. Helping students make friends enhances their school experience and performance, and cuts down on bullying and teasing. Teachers should maintain high expectations of the student's school performance, no matter how severe the disability.

Muscle weakness and fatigue can make it hard for students to keep up with the physical demands of handwriting, completing assignments, organizing materials, etc. In winter, the increased susceptibility to (and life-threatening consequences of) respiratory infections may cause students to miss many days of school.

A few neuromuscular diseases bring a higher-than-average risk of learning disabilities and mental retardation. This may affect learning to read or understanding math concepts, being able to attend to a lesson or comprehending classroom concepts.

Resources

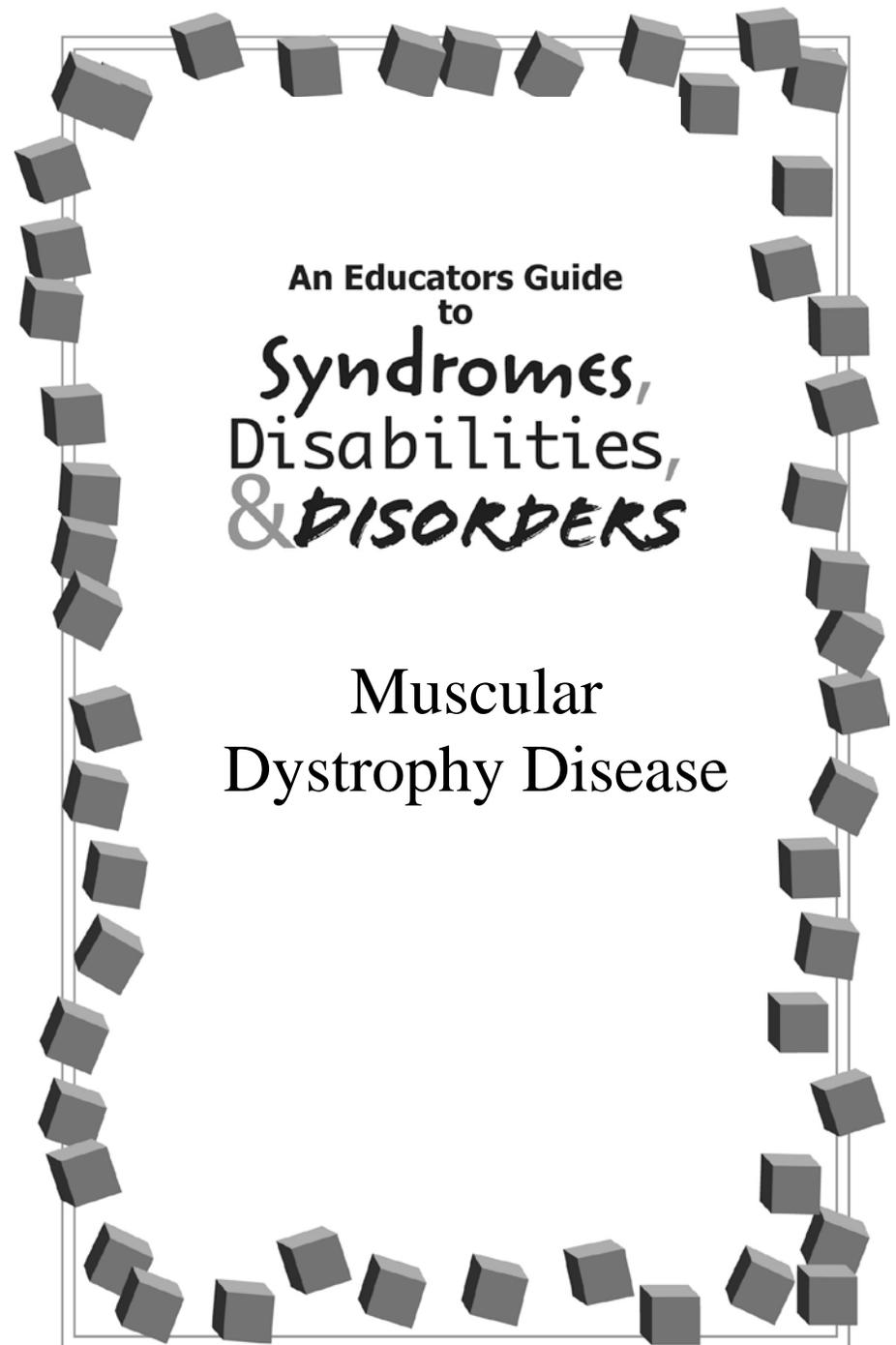
Muscular Dystrophy Association - www.mdausa.org

Muscular Dystrophy Family Foundation - www.mdff.org

[Hope For Muscular Dystrophy](http://www.hopeformd.org) - Awareness for Muscular Dystrophy; Girls with DMD Community; emotional and educational support.
<http://www.hopeformd.org>

[Muscular Dystrophy](http://nlm.nih.gov) [nlm.nih.gov]

From MEDLINEplus, the National Library of Medicine Web site



Symptoms or Behaviors

Muscular dystrophy is not a single condition. It is the name of a group of approximately 20 muscle disorders characterized by progressive degeneration of muscle fibers. Each particular disorder has specific differences related to the severity of the symptoms, the rate of deterioration, the age group most affected, the extent of the damage and the muscles involved.

Instructional Strategies and Classroom Accommodations

- Meet with the student and the parents early in the school year to help determine the student's individual needs.
- From this meeting and from previous school records, assess the need for an individual education program and develop an IEP if required.
- Work as a member of a team to help the student lead a productive life. Include parents, para-professionals, health care professionals and possibly peers.
- Talk to the class about muscular dystrophy, and if the student is comfortable with the situation, have the student or parents explain any specific needs. Encourage other students to find out how they can assist and when they should assist.
- If necessary, schedule bathroom breaks for the student who needs assistance, from a para-professional, just before class breaks.
- Encourage the student to remain as active as possible, to keep healthy muscles in condition as long as possible. Inactivity contributes to loss of muscle action.
- Try different strategies: use computers, handout, tapes, overheads, to allow the student to keep pace with the rest of the class.
- Orient the student to elevators and ramps, if necessary.
- In consultation with a physiotherapist, encourage as much physical activity as possible, not only for muscle therapy but also to foster social relationships. This gives the student a break from the seated position. Standing for two to four hours per day may have both physiological and psychological benefits.
- Be alert for signs of withdrawal and depression. The student may feel less a part of the class as the condition progresses.
- Build self-confidence by encouraging active participation in classroom activities. Some subject areas such as physical education,

science or industrial education may need certain modifications or alternative assignments.

- Allow time to finish assignments and exams. Even if extra time is necessary, completing a task will do much to develop the feeling of self-confidence.
- Ensure appropriate seating - this may be near the board, near the front, near the door or at a table suitable for a wheelchair.
- Expect group participation in cooperative learning groups to overcome specific difficulties in subject areas.
- Ensure an exchange of information between the home and the school for mutual understanding and consistency of expectations.

Common Areas of Difficulty

- keeping up with class work
- difficulty with written language and writing tasks
- fatigue
- difficulty paying attention and concentrating
- math and reading difficulties
- participating in classroom activities
- participating in physical education
- being pulled away from academic instruction for therapy
- physical positioning and special seating
- health concerns, such as respiratory infections
- social skills and peer relations
- physical accessibility of the school campus, including doorway widths, stairs, heavy doors, water fountains, distances between classes, curbs, aisles between desks and accessible bathrooms