

Studying with ME: Tips from Sarah Smith

I was 14 and in the third year of secondary school when I became seriously ill with ME after having glandular fever two years earlier. In some ways I was lucky, as my decline in health was well documented by both my GP and my school and there was never any question that I was genuinely ill.

A few months later I was assessed and allocated a home tutor for five hours a week. Thankfully, there was no pressure from the school or my tutor to produce any written work and they let me recover at my own pace. As I improved, the school provided me with a laptop computer as I found, and still do, that typing is less painful than writing.

When I finally took some exams, I was allowed extra time, as my reading and writing is slower than that of a healthy student, and I used a computer for my English exams. I gained the highest grades available (A* and a B) and received the Open Learning Award for my achievements!

This is the advice I can offer to other students with ME:

- **Be realistic:** It's impossible to predict how you'll feel from day to day, so do what you can and don't feel guilty for not working.
- **Be sensible:** Make sure you take regular rest breaks, however tempting it is to finish an assignment!
- **Be honest:** Admit that you need help and ask for it. Tutors can only help if they understand your difficulties.
- **Be good to yourself:** Don't spend every ounce of energy on study. You need to relax and enjoy life as well.