

FAQ: 504 Plans and Individualized Education Programs

Find out if a 504 plan or IEP could help ensure academic success for your child with migraine.

Students with migraine often benefit from accommodations and modifications at school. A 504 plan or Individualized Education Program (IEP) outlines the accommodations or services your child is entitled to receive, based on their individual needs. This guide covers the differences between a 504 plan and an IEP, as well as helpful information for parents navigating this process.

What is a 504 Plan?

A 504 plan is a part of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1979. It guarantees **accommodations** to ensure a student who has a disability has the **same access to curriculum and instruction** and opportunity for **academic success** as their peers who do not have a disability. A 504 plan does not include federal funding or a case manager, so it is the **responsibility of the parent** and/or student to ensure the plan is followed.

What is an IEP?

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a part of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). There are 14 categories of disability in which a child is eligible for an IEP and the modifications that come with it. Students with migraine, if eligible, typically fall within the category "Other Health Impairment."

An IEP outlines **specific services**, such as specialized academic instruction or speech and language therapy, that are made possible through **federal funding**. These services usually take place during the school day. An IEP includes the **accountability** of a case manager and regular assessments to ensure the student receives services and meets academic goals. IEPs are only facilitated in public schools, but a student who attends private school will have access to the educational services, assessments, and federal support in the district where the private school is located. However, this requires a great deal of coordination, petitioning, and transportation to and from the private school and the local public school to coordinate.

What are some migraine-specific considerations?

Accommodations are personalized to your child's needs. Examples of accommodations that can be helpful for children with migraine include:

- Additional time to complete assignments or assessments
- Reduced length of assessments, or the option to receive verbal assessments
- Reduced volume of assignments or a representative amount of work to demonstrate mastery
- Reduced work or access to notes from the teacher or a designated note taker if the student misses class
- Access to speech-to-text and text-to-speech tools, as well as audio books, to reduce time looking at screens and print materials
- A separate setting for test-taking with optimal lighting and/or fewer distractions
- Allowances to reduce triggers, such as wearing sunglasses or a hood during class
- The ability to stand, walk, take breaks or drink water at the student's discretion
- Excused absences for medical appointments
- Recorded lectures for future listening



Frequently Asked Questions

How do I know if a 504 or IEP is right for my child?

It is recommended to start with a 504 plan. Establishing a 504 plan is a much shorter process, and schools typically must accommodate it, especially for a student with a diagnosed medical need. Once a 504 plan is requested in writing, a school has **30 days** to hold a meeting and come up with a plan.

An IEP doesn't require that a student has a 504 plan first, but it does require that you have tried other accommodations and still haven't met the child's needs. For that reason, it helps to start with a 504 plan. Also, an IEP process typically takes a **minimum of 90 days** and much more back-and-forth communication to be established. Most states will require a formal **domains** process, where all elements (domains) of a child's development are assessed, before formalizing a written IE with goals and accommodations.

Both a 504 plan and IEP can include similar **accommodations**. But if your student requires a modification to the curriculum, it makes sense to go straight to establishing an IEP. A modification is a change in the curriculum. For example, instead of writing a three-page essay on weather patterns for science class, your student's assignment could be to gather six photos of different types of clouds.

How often can I update a 504 or IEP?

A 504 plan can be changed every 30 days because that's the timeframe in which a school must respond to a meeting request. But practically speaking, for a 504 or IEP, schools will ask for a reasonable period of time—typically at **least one semester**—to determine whether the accommodations or modifications are working. An IEP is renewed and changed every year, whether a parent requests it or not, and it is reevaluated every three years.

How should I decide how many and which accommodations to request?

Your child is often the best assessor for what types of accommodations would be helpful. Talk to your child or ask that they write a list of everything that would help them get a good grade in their class. While not every accommodation may be granted, it is always better to ask for it than assume the answer is no.

What should I do if I'm getting pushback from the school?

Think of creating a 504 plan as a negotiation process. Make sure all requested accommodations are valid and relevant to your student's needs, but know that there's no such thing as too many accommodations. 504 plans can be very robust and detailed.

In the case of a 504 or IEP, if you receive pushback from the school, **submit a letter** from your child's doctor and **connect with a local advocacy group** that can offer parent-to-parent educational advocates.

What happens when my child goes to college?

A 504 plan can follow a student to college, but an IEP cannot. Consider writing a 504 for your student during their senior year of high school so that it can continue with them into college. Each year, you or your child will want to make sure that the school renews their 504 plan.

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The mission of the American Migraine Foundation is to mobilize a community for patient support and advocacy, as well as drive and support impactful research that translates into advances for patients with migraine and other disabling diseases that cause severe head pain. Visit americanmigraine.org for more resources for people living with migraine and their supporters.

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