

What is "Other Health Impairment" (OHI)

What is "Other Health Impairment" (OHI), and how does it pertain to students with special needs qualifying for an Individual Education Plan (IEP)? *There are many eligibility criteria that need to be met to qualify a child for an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Often as parents attempt to access eligibility and establish placement of an IEP for their Mito child, they are confronted with the dilemma that their child's school's does not understand where and how a child who is diagnosed with Mitochondrial Disease would/will qualify.

Many children with Mitochondrial Disease are not learning disabled, but have variable multiple medical issues which impede their ability to either attend school, or stay current with their academic peers due to repetitive extended absences, but HAVE NOT been diagnosed with any learning disabilities. This is not to say that children with mitochondrial disease don't ever have learning disabilities, but as a rule children who are diagnosed with Mitochondrial Disease often times, fall under the category of OHI for IEP eligibility, and placement. Parents often tell me that their child is being denied an IEP due to the fact that their child is not showing signs of being "behind" or "struggling enough" academically to qualify for an IEP.

As you read the following, you will understand that this denial should not be accepted by parents whose children have a mitochondrial/disease or disorder, based on federal and state regulations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Definition: "Other Health Impaired" Federal and State Regulations are essentially the same but I always advise parents to compare OHI eligibility requirements within your own state with the federal regulations, as the language can vary state to state.

According to Federal Regulations , "Other health impairment" means having limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment that is due to chronic or acute health problems such as, but not limited to: asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, Rheumatic fever and sickle cell anemia; and adversely affects a child's educational performance. The list of chronic or acute health problems included within this definition is not exhaustive." (1)

So, don't get nervous that your child's diagnosis is not in the list above, as many other medical conditions meet eligibility requirements under the OHI placement category, which are also not listed above.

Children with Mitochondrial Disease may be classified as eligible for services under the "other health impairment" category in instances where the Mitochondrial Disease/Disorder is a chronic or acute health problem that results in limited alertness, which adversely affects the child's educational performance resulting in the need for special education and related services. Referral characteristics for the student with, "other health impairment (OHI)" do not fall into specific intellectual, academic, behavioral, language or physical categories. Indicators of an, "other health impairment" may or may not be observable.

The following conditions may indicate the presence of an OHI (2): (they also may vary in language from state to state)

(1) a long period of absence due to a chronic or acute health problem;

- (2) An inability to attend to task for the same length of time as peers, due to a chronic or acute health problem;
- (3) An inability to attend to task as a result of medication being taken for a chronic or acute health problem; and/
or
- (4) An inability to attend school for more than a few hours per day due to limited strength or vitality.”

For most types of health impairments, a physician's diagnosis serves as the basis for classification, although academic and behavioral testing such as neuropsychological testing (NPT), in conjunction with the medical diagnosis often help define and secure the placement of OHI, for IEP qualifications for children who have Mito.

NPT testing also gives the parents, teachers, and schools the necessary information and recommendations as to what accommodations and /or modifications will be necessary to establish the proper IEP for the student. Ton's of IMPORTANT information here.

Please feel free to ask questions about OHI eligibility and placement requirements for IEP's. Further information is available on our searchable data base.

*The language used in this posting is at times directly quoted and footnoted from the: U.S. Department of Education's websites: <http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml>. (1) And, (2) <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/home>