

Self-care for students

Leaving home for the first time and going to university or college can be a very exciting time. Meeting new people and taking on a new level of study can also be challenging and most students will have their ups and downs. Feeling some pressure can help you to feel motivated when working towards a deadline or sitting an exam, for example. But everyone can have days when things can get too much. **The good news is there are lots of things you can do to help you stay mentally well during your time at college or university:**



Organise your time

- **Try to prioritise** - review your to-do list and deadlines each week to help reduce last-minute stress. Decide what needs doing now and what can wait. Think about which tasks will make the biggest difference and try to concentrate on one at a time. If you're feeling very stressed it can help to pick one task now and focus on that.
- **Keep a structure to your day** - you may be juggling your studies with a busy social life, groups and societies, even working part-time. It's easy to feel overwhelmed sometimes. Keeping to a routine can really help - try to get up and go to bed at the same times, for example.
- **Break assignments up** - into smaller, more manageable chunks. Don't try to do everything at once. Check out if your college or university offers study skill support.



Reduce the pressure

- **Take regular breaks** - you'll feel more relaxed and better able to cope. Get up for a stretch, take a walk outside in the fresh air or go for a run. Try to take a break between terms so that you return to your studies feeling refreshed.
- **Create time for yourself each day** - build in at least 30 minutes each day to shut off and do something you enjoy - read a book, watch your favourite TV programme, play football or listen to music.
- **Be kind to yourself** - leaving home for the first time, adapting new ways of learning and trying to make new friends is a big deal. Adjusting can take time. Hang in there! And remember being at college or university is about developing yourself; it's not about being perfect all the time.



Talk to someone if you're struggling

- **Stay connected** - meet a friend, someone you trust, and go for a coffee and a chat. Be there for your friends if they need to chat as well. It's also important to stay in touch with your old support network whether that's your family or school friends.
- **Don't keep problems to yourself** - talking things through can relieve some of the pressure and help you feel more supported. Whether you're feeling stressed about exams, family or money worries or breaking up with a partner; another person can often see a problem in a different way and suggest things that might help. Try talking to your tutor, student wellbeing team, a friend, family member or go to www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk/talk



Look after your physical health

Taking care of your physical health can help to improve your mood and mental wellbeing:

- **Try to take 30 minutes of moderate exercise every day** - go for a walk, run, swim or try a class or group. Find something you enjoy.
- **Eat well** - it's easy to turn to sugary or processed foods when you're busy studying but eating a well-balanced diet with lots of fresh vegetables can really make a difference.
- **Try to limit/avoid caffeine, smoking, alcohol or drugs** - we might feel like turning to some of these in times of stress. Unfortunately, they can make you feel more anxious as well as affecting your sleep and physical wellbeing.



Get a good night's sleep

Sleep is essential for both our physical and mental health. Everyone is different but most adults need an average of seven to nine hours of sleep. Not getting enough sleep can affect your memory and mental processes like learning, concentration and problem-solving. Getting a good night's sleep recharges you for the day ahead and can help you to feel stronger and better able to cope. **There's lots of help in improving the way you sleep at www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk/sleep.**



Take time to relax

- **Practise relaxation and breathing techniques every day** - diaphragmatic breathing (a deep breathing technique) can help you feel calmer and reduce the effects of stress.
- **Try different ways to relax** such as yoga or Mindfulness. Find what works for you.
- **Do something new** - ever fancied tango dancing, basketball or martial arts? Give it a go! Look for a club or society you can join.

You can find lots of information about ways of relaxing at www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk/relax



Positive self-talk is important

Sometimes having negative thoughts can affect our mood and the way we feel. **Talk to yourself kindly and with encouragement. How would a good friend talk to you?** And if the going gets tough remind yourself of positive feedback you've had and your motivations in doing the course. You could also ask other people to share their positive thoughts as well.



Try a digital detox

Digital devices are now part of life. They help us to work remotely and feel connected. But there can be downsides. Using devices for long periods can create 'information overload', affect the way we sleep and can sometimes stop us from just talking to one another. Social media can also add to the pressures we're feeling when we see constant posts about other people's exciting and 'perfect' lives. It can also be a platform where the mistakes we make are recorded forever AND that some people use to bully others or share inappropriate information. **Try to take a digital detox an hour before you go to sleep and cut down on social media. Why not meet a friend for a chat instead?**