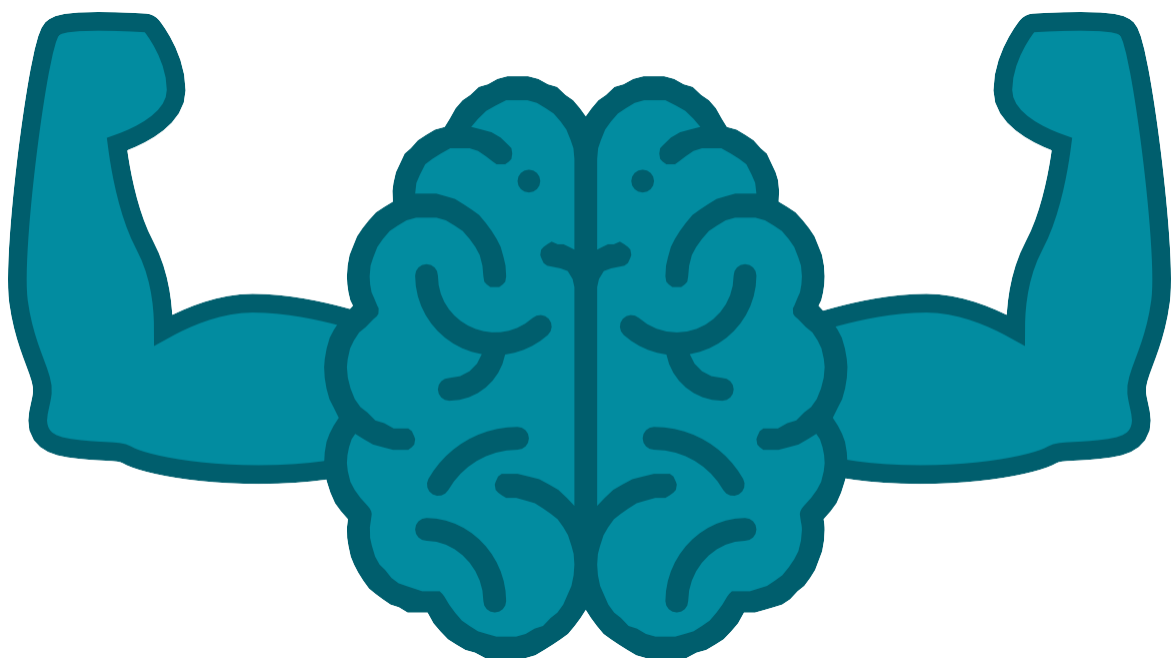


Mental Health Support

Looking after your mental health

2020



Student life can sometimes be overwhelming. It is a time of significant transition which can be both positive and challenging and have an impact on your mental health. Such challenges can lead to stress, anxiety, or depression and you may find it difficult to concentrate or motivate yourself or you may experience issues with relationships, alcohol or drugs. This document provides suggestions on ways of coping and where you can turn for support.

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Common stressors and stress management strategies

Approximately one in ten young people experience mental health problems. This can include depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm and can be triggered by a number of common stressors including:

- Academic pressure/poor grades
- Relationship problems
- Loneliness or homesickness
- Making new friends
- Feeling marginalised, misunderstood or like you don't fit in
- Worrying about family members at home
- Financial issues
- Loss of family or community support
- Drug or alcohol use
- Problems sleeping
- Grief
- Questioning gender/sexuality

You may find it helpful to build strategies to manage stress. Here are some simple suggestions:

- Create to-do lists and tackle items one by one
- Exercise regularly (even gentle exercise, like yoga, swimming or a walk, especially if outdoors, can help)
- Get enough sleep (a regular schedule with at least 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night is important)
- Explore time-management strategies
- Take time out to relax
- Practice mindful meditation
- Eat healthily (for some tips see: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-every-day-living/food-and-mood/#.XTR5FZMza3V>)
- Avoid alcohol and drugs
- Seek support from family, friends, or peers, your school or university services, charities and organisations

When to seek support

- If you regularly have one or a combination of the following symptoms, reach out for support:
 - Lacking energy and feeling extremely tired
 - Feeling restless and agitated
 - Feeling tearful or very sad
 - Not wanting to talk to or be with people
 - Not wanting to do things you usually enjoy
 - Not eating/throwing up
 - Using substances such as alcohol or drugs, or behaviours such as excessive shopping, sex, gambling, to cope with feelings
 - Finding it hard to cope with everyday life
 - Having problems sleeping

It's normal to feel down or stressed sometimes but if your feelings regularly affect your daily activities and your studies and do not go away after a couple of weeks, **SEEK SUPPORT IMMEDIATELY.**

What support is available

You might be reluctant, at first, to seek help. You may feel embarrassed or nervous but help is available and making the most of it can make a positive difference to your life. You might consider seeking support from:

Friends, peers and family

Building friendships and supportive relationships can help you deal with your problems. Talk to friends, peers and family. Seek out peers, friends or family who are supportive, and avoid those who you feel may be toxic or unsupportive. It may feel embarrassing at first but talking to the people you love or feel close to, and who love and care about you, often helps. Meeting others with experience of mental health difficulties may also help. Check if your school or university runs peer support groups on campus (you can usually self-refer to peer support programmes). Online peer support is also available through communities like Elefriends (<https://www.elefriends.org.uk>).

You could also check out peer support programmes near you (e.g. Student Minds, UK: <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/about.html> <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/ourpeersupportprogrammes.html>).

Your school, college or university

Horizon partner schools/colleges, particularly UWC schools, offer various support services for mental health issues. This may involve qualified counsellors, psychologists, medical professionals, houseparents, peer listeners/supporters. If you are in need of support you should speak to your main focal point, which may include your tutor, houseparent or housemaster or dame and their deputies and assistants, host family coordinator, peer supporters, and university counsellors for information on what is available.

Provision of mental health and wellbeing services varies for each college or university but normally includes a free and confidential Student Support/Welfare service staffed by mental health professionals. You can normally find out what is on offer and how to make an appointment in the counselling section of your college or university's website. Your academic supervisor or tutor may also be able to provide support and advice and help you access relevant academic/other support.

Your student union may also be helpful. They will be able to point you in the direction of university services and/or relevant medical professionals.

Your doctor

Your doctor/General Practitioner (GP) will be able to support you by making a diagnosis, by referring you to a specialist service or by helping you to access appropriate support/treatment. To access a doctor contact the personnel or centre responsible for student well-being at your school or university.

Lifestyle tips for better mental health

1. Manage your stress

- a. meditate
 - b. practice mind-body therapies such as yoga, qi gong, tai chi, etc.
 - c. take time out for relaxation
2. Connect with nature and natural light
 - a. make sure you get outside daily to get some sunlight and fresh air
 - b. go for a walk or a run in nature
 - c. do some gardening
3. Get enough sleep
 - a. stick to a daily sleep routine -- try to go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning
 - b. turn off your screens 2 hours before bed as the blue light from your screens blocks melatonin, your sleep hormone. You can also install flux, a software programme which dims blue light, and/or wear blue-light blocking glasses
 - c. make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark and free of wifi and phone signal
 - d. allow at least two hours between your last meal and going to sleep
4. Get proper nutrition
 - a. minimise refined carbohydrates (sugars, white flour, etc.)
 - b. minimise alcohol
 - c. minimise caffeine
 - d. eat whole foods rather than processed (so avoid anything in a package and eat fresh foods)
 - e. eat healthy fats (olive oil, nuts, seeds, avocados, eggs, coconut oil)
 - f. eat lots of vegetables and some fruit. As many colours of the rainbow as you can
 - g. eat plenty of protein
 - i. grass fed, free range meats and poultry, wild caught fish (small fish are better than large ones as these can be full of mercury), eggs
 - ii. if you are vegetarian make sure to get enough protein from vegetable sources such as Tempeh, legumes, and ideally eggs
 - h. supplement if you need to -- omega 3, B complex, vitamin D, vitamin C, magnesium and zinc are the main brain and mood boosting vitamins and minerals
 - i. drink plenty of water (about 2 litres a day) and make sure it is filtered or spring water
 - j. try to eat organic if you can
5. Reduce toxic load
 - a. choose natural care products which don't have toxic chemicals
 - b. avoid air fresheners and perfumes
 - c. No recreational drugs
 - d. minimal alcohol
 - e. careful of pharmaceutical drugs which could make your condition worse, can disrupt your gut and hormones, and could be addictive
 - i. sleeping pills
 - ii. tranquilizers
 - iii. birth control
 - iv. antacids

- v. pain killers
 - vi. anti-inflammatories such as ibuprofen.
6. Exercise appropriately
- a. get regular exercise
 - b. exercise daily if possible, or at least 4x a week
 - c. exercise with moderation -- not too much, not too little
 - d. mix gentle exercise (swimming, walking, yoga, tai chi, qi gong, etc.) with more intense exercise (running, aerobic, biking, high intensity training, etc.)

These tips are taken from <https://www.mindhealth360.com/solutions/>

References

NHS Choices Moodzone (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/>)

Students Against Depression (<https://www.studentsagainstdepression.org/>)

NHS Choices Live Well (<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/>)

How to Cope with Student Life

(https://www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/mind_how_to_cope_with_student_life_web_2016.pdf)