

Looking after your mental health

Top tips for students

Student life can be great. It can also be really challenging.

Do you feel like everyone else is having an amazing time and that you're the only one feeling low? The truth is – it's not just you. Mental health issues, like depression and anxiety, are really common and can improve with help. There's some helpful advice in this leaflet – and much more at studentsagainstdepression.org

STUDENTS AGAINST DEPRESSION

Are you finding it hard to concentrate?

Most students have trouble concentrating at some point, but depressed or anxious thinking habits can make you feel worse.

Practical steps you can take:

- Talk to your personal tutor or another member of staff. You may feel anxious about doing this, but it can be an important first step in dealing with problems
- Recognise if you are getting into depressed thinking habits, like perfectionism, self-bullying and all-or-nothing thinking
- Learn how to manage your time – many colleges and universities offer help with study skills

Are you having trouble sleeping?

Sleep disturbances are not unusual. They can be due to anxiety about your studies, relationships, or health; not getting enough exercise; eating too much or too little; or working too late in the evenings, amongst other things.

Practical things you can do:

- Only go to bed when you're feeling sleepy, and don't nap during the day
- Stop using screens half an hour before you go to bed
- Get some fresh air and exercise every day – a twenty minute walk is a good start

Are you feeling depressed?

Depression can have many causes, including low self-esteem, loneliness, lack of support, family problems or relationship breakdowns. Some people know exactly what has triggered their depression but for others it can be hard to understand why they feel the way they do.

The important thing is to talk to someone about it. Many, many people experience depression at some point in their lives. The good news is that it can get better. You don't have to go through it alone, so please talk to your GP, your college or university counselling service or a trusted friend or family member.

Are you feeling anxious?

We can all experience everyday anxiety about things like meeting new people or taking exams. However, anxiety might be problematic if it's intense and frequent; if you feel nauseous or shaky or your heart beats fast; if you feel anxious for no obvious reason; or if it's very specific, such as persistent anxiety about your health or social situations. Anxiety is very common and help is available so please talk to your GP or student counselling service.

Things to use in the moment when anxiety strikes:

- Learn breathing techniques – these can calm you and help slow down physical responses, such as heart rate. There is a very simple one here: www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/ways-relieve-stress/
- Do some physical activity – to ‘burn off’ some of the stress hormone and distract your mind
- Tell yourself you will be okay – while it might be frightening, the high anxiety or panic will naturally begin to subside of its own accord
- Find a safe space – somewhere you can just allow yourself to ‘be’ for a few minutes while you use your breathing techniques

Mental wellbeing: a student perspective

Freya Hillyer, a student at Leeds University, talks about student mental health.

Being a student is difficult at the best of times, with challenges from exams and the pressure of making new friends, to living independently. With more students revealing they’re suffering with poor mental health, it’s important to note some of the deep-rooted issues which can contribute to this and also share with each other and professionals to help tackle these problems.

In my first year I dropped out, as a result of many things, but an overriding cause was definitely mental health and my lack of adjustment to university life. University is hard sometimes and it’s ok to admit you’re not having ‘the time of your life’ as you are often told you will.

The academic side of university is a huge challenge as it is so different from A-Levels and secondary school. I was told that A-Levels were the hardest education would get – fake news! Being at university, they expect you to want to learn; it’s no longer a case of just passing exams, it’s about independence, which does put students under pressure.

I did not do well academically in my first year; I let bad grades and leaving too much work to the last minute get on top of me, causing panic attacks and anxiety. Another major issue for me and many people I know was making new friends. My housemate and I talked about this and it was only then I realised I wasn’t the only person who suffered with this.

Freya’s top tips for looking after your mental wellbeing as a student

- TALK! Other people are going through the same as you, they’re just not saying anything either
- Go in with no expectations
- Take time with your work – good grades won’t necessarily come naturally at university

Further information and resources



Studentsagainstdepression.org

is a trusted source of mental health advice.

The websites below also feature lots of useful information.

www.nhs.uk

www.studentminds.org.uk

www.nightline.ac.uk

If you need help now

If you have any suicidal feelings at any point it is important to talk to someone you trust, or seek help from a GP or a counsellor. Getting the right support early can play an important part in preventing things from becoming worse.

It is important to act immediately if:

- You feel that your suicidal thoughts are immediate and/or beyond your control
- Your thoughts about suicide might inadvertently put others at risk
- You have already done something that might put your life at risk, e.g., overdosed

What to do

Call 999 and ask for immediate help, telling the emergency operator your name, date of birth, address, any actions you have already taken, and about your feelings of suicide. If you can safely get to an Accident and Emergency Department yourself, do so immediately.

You can also ring one of these helplines if you need to talk to someone now, or while you wait for help to arrive:

Samaritans

Telephone: 116 123 (free line)

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Papyrus HOPELine

Telephone: 0800 068 41 41 (free line)

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