



Australia Awards

Mental Health and Wellbeing

This resource provides you with information about mental health, including signs of stress, how to manage it and resources in Australia that may be helpful.

What is good mental health?

Having good mental health means being able to work and study to our full potential, cope with life's day-to-day challenges, and live our lives in a free and satisfying way. Good mental health is just as important as good physical health.

Moving to Australia, settling into a new country and commencing studies may present challenges. It's important to know how this may affect you, how you can help maintain good mental health and what to do if you need extra help.

Stress and how to manage it

Emotions such as sadness, loneliness, anger, disappointment and confusion can cause us to feel stressed.

Stress and these emotions are normal and part of life, but when these emotions persist for long periods of time, or exceed what we can cope with, they can lead to poor mental health and mental health problems.

Signs of stress include:

- decreased energy, fatigue
- muscle tension
- high blood pressure
- headaches
- digestive disorders
- elevated heart rate or palpitations
- comfort eating or lack of appetite
- trouble sleeping.

A good way to keep on top of our mental health is to learn effective strategies for dealing with stress. Here are a few examples that may help you manage any early signs of stress.

Eat well:

Eating well reduces the risk of both mental health and physical health issues. It can help with sleeping patterns, energy levels, and our general health and wellbeing. A balanced diet with plenty of vegetables, fruit, whole grains and water will help both the brain and the body to function well.

Sleep well:

Getting a good night's sleep and developing a sleep routine can help us feel more energised, focused and motivated. Aim to maximise relaxation before going to sleep, avoid caffeine in the evening and minimise the use of brightly lit phone or computer screens before bed.

Exercise:

Stress increases the levels of certain hormones in the body, such as adrenaline or cortisol. Physical exercise is a great way to metabolise these hormones, and in turn releases other chemicals such as serotonin and endorphins that have the opposite effect and help us feel better. Physical activity also helps relieve tension in the body and distracts the mind from stressful thought cycles.

Relax:

There are lots of different relaxation techniques, and what works for one person may not necessarily work for another. Some things that people try to help them relax include going for a walk outdoors, deep breathing techniques, meditation, mindfulness and yoga. Others find that a creative outlet helps them to relax, such as art, writing or listening to music. Even catching up with a friend or family member can help us feel more relaxed. It's important to find a way to help ourselves to relax and remember to do this when we start to feel stressed.

Connect with others:

It can be important to maintain connections with friends, loved ones and your Student Contact Officer when you're experiencing stress. Connecting and communicating with others helps people understand what you are experiencing and can remind you that you're not going through this alone.



What to do if you feel overwhelmed

Sometimes, as hard as we try to manage our stress, we can feel overwhelmed. We may feel that we're not enjoying the things that we used to, we can become easily irritated, and our performance in study and work can be affected. If you start to feel this way, it's important to ask for help and support. Declining mental health can lead to more severe psychological conditions, and even cause and exacerbate physical illnesses.

Your university offers student counselling services. Information on these services can usually be found on your institution's website, and your Student Contact Officer will be able to direct you to these services and help put strategies in place to minimise the effect on your studies.

It is against Australian law for universities to discriminate against students who require support for mental health conditions, and you can feel comfortable approaching your Student Contact Officer if you need support.

For additional help, you can seek advice from a health practitioner such as a GP, counsellor or psychologist.

How to help if a friend or loved one is experiencing stress

The better we get at recognising early signs of stress that may contribute or lead to poor mental health in ourselves, the more likely we are to notice it in those close to us. They may be aware that they are experiencing difficulties and already seeking help, or they may not have realised that they are struggling.

One of the most helpful things we can do for those we think may be struggling to deal with stress is to simply ask them if they are okay. However, it's important to respect their wishes regarding whether they want to talk about any problems they may be having. Just asking may be enough to make them aware of how they're feeling and let them know that they can talk to you, or others, about it if they want to.

If they do disclose that they are having problems, listen without judgement and offer positive ideas and solutions. You could suggest any of the recommendations in this fact sheet; if they are already getting help, you can simply ask how it's going and offer to be there if they need someone to talk to.

Resources and further information

If you or someone you know would like further information about mental health or strategies to help if you're experiencing problems, listed below are some organisations that you can get in touch with to get you started.

Head to Health – Department of Health
www.headtohealth.gov.au

Beyond Blue
www.beyondblue.org.au

Reach Out
www.reachout.com

RU OK?
www.ruok.org.au

Lifeline 24 Hour Crisis Hotline
13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au

In case of emergency, please call the emergency services on 000.

We recommend that you seek professional assistance if you are experiencing mental health issues. The information in this brochure, while helpful, is not a substitute for guidance from a health professional.

