



Australia Awards

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## 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 everyday 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 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 any of us to feel stressed. Stress and these emotions are normal and part of life, but when these emotions persist for lengthy periods of time, or exceed what we can cope with, they can lead to poor mental health and mental health problems.

Some of the signs of stress include:

- Decreased energy, fatigue
- Muscle tension, aches, and pains
- High blood pressure
- Headaches, dizziness or shaking
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes in mood, irritability, or anger
- Stomach or digestive problems
- Elevated heart rate or palpitations
- Lack of appetite or comfort eating
- Trouble sleeping
- Withdrawing from friends and family

Learning effective skills to deal with stress in life is a good strategy to ensure your mental health and wellbeing flourishes. Here are a few examples that may help you manage the early signs of stress.

### Eat well

Eating well reduces the risk of both mental and physical health issues. A healthy diet helps with sleeping patterns, energy levels and our general health and wellbeing. A balanced diet of two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables, whole grains and water is a big step towards a healthier life, as it will help your brain and body 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 your relaxation before going to sleep, try to go to bed at the same time each night, avoid caffeine, alcohol or nicotine in the evening and minimise the use of devices with a screen like your phone or computer before going to bed.

### Exercise

Stress increases the levels of the hormones adrenaline and cortisol in the body. Physical exercise is a terrific way to metabolise these hormones, and in turn releases the chemicals serotonin and endorphins that have the opposite effect, helping us to feel better. 30 minutes a day of moderate activity every day makes a big difference to your health. Physical activity also helps relieve tension in the body and distracts the mind from stressful or unhelpful thought cycles.

### Relax

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

### Connect with others

Staying connected to friends, loved ones and your Student Contact Officer when you are feeling stressed is important. Connecting and communicating with others helps people understand what you are experiencing and feeling and can remind you that you're not going through this alone.





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### 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 were not enjoying the things we used to, we can be easily irritated, and our performance at 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 or impact negatively other illnesses you may have already.

Your university offers student counselling services. Information on these services can 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 impact 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.

You can seek additional advice and help from a health practitioner such as a doctor in a GP clinic, 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 they are experiencing difficulties and are already seeking help, or they may not have realised that they are struggling.

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

If they do say 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 and wellbeing strategies to support you if you're experiencing problems, listed below are some organisations that you can contact to get you started.

#### Head to Health- Department of Health

[www.headtohealth.gov.au](http://www.headtohealth.gov.au)

#### Beyond Blue

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

#### Be Well- SA Health Medical Research Institute partnership

[www.bewellco.io](http://www.bewellco.io)

#### Black Dog Institute

[www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)

#### Embrace Multicultural Mental Health

[www.embracementalhealth.org.au](http://www.embracementalhealth.org.au)

#### Headspace

[www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

#### Health Direct

[www.healthdirect.gov.au](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au)

#### Reach Out

[www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)

#### RU OK?

[www.ruok.org.au](http://www.ruok.org.au)

#### Lifeline 24-hour crisis hotline

13 11 14

[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

We recommend that you seek professional assistance if you are experiencing mental health and wellbeing issues. The information in this brochure is a helpful start. You should also seek the guidance of a health professional who will help support you to overcome any mental health and wellbeing challenges you are experiencing.

