

The importance of self-care

It is important to look after your body and your mind. This will give you the best chance of managing difficult situations or strong emotions, and help you live your life to the fullest. Below are some general tips for a healthy lifestyle.

HEALTHY EATING

Establish a healthy diet. This will help reduce stress and increase your ability to cope. Get to know your body and become aware of how certain foods affect you physically. For example, foods high in caffeine (e.g. tea, coffee, chocolate), cigarettes, and alcohol can add stress to your body.

Healthy Eating Tips:

- Eat a balanced diet - include plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables, whole grains and protein. This helps to replenish essential vitamins and minerals that stress tends to use up
- Drink plenty of water including at least 2 litres per day
- Eat regularly, don't skip meals, and avoid long periods of time without food
- Don't overeat or starve yourself

SLEEP

Sleep is essential for coping with life's ups and downs, and for managing stress. Try to get a minimum of 6 hours sleep each night, and refrain from sleeping beyond 9 hours.

Tips to Improve Your Sleep:

- Go to bed and rise around the same time each day
- Cut down on your caffeine intake and avoid smoking or using alcohol before bedtime

- Avoid bright lights, overly hot baths and showers, or heavy exercise at night-time. This stimulates your body and makes it difficult to wind down and get to sleep
- Avoid reading or doing other activities in bed. Keep your bed associated with sleep or physical intimacy only
- Do not lie awake in bed for longer than 20 minutes. If you haven't fallen asleep after 20 minutes get up and do something relaxing (e.g. drink a cup of camomile tea or warm milk, or do a relaxation exercise) and then go back to bed
- If you find it difficult to stop worrying in bed, get up and write a list or note of what you need to do or are worrying about, and then go back to bed
- Engage in regular exercise as this will help you to sleep well

ACTIVITY

Activity helps you to feel better and gives you a different focus.

Doing things, even a little at a time, can give you a sense that you are moving forward, taking control of your life, and achieving something worthwhile.

Activity and exercise is important because it:

- releases tension and encourages the release of natural endorphins
- helps you to feel less tired
- increases your confidence
- strengthens your immune system
- revives your body and mind, and assists you to think more clearly

Once you get started, you might also find that you take a different perspective on particular problems in your life.

* It is always important to avoid the use of mind-altering drugs, or alcohol in excess.
* Talk to your doctor before making any radical changes to your lifestyle.

The Project Air Strategy acknowledges the major support of NSW Health. The Project works with mental health clinicians, consumers and carers to deliver effective treatments, implements research strategies supporting scientific discoveries, and offers high quality training and education. Contact us at info-projectair@uow.edu.au or visit www.projectairstrategy.org