



**Mental Health for Students:
An Occupational Therapy Perspective**

Occupational therapy is a health care profession concerned with a person's independence in and satisfaction with the everyday activities and roles that give meaning in life. Being in school or college can be a stressful experience for you especially during exam times. If you are experiencing mental health difficulties you may find it difficult to be self-directed and motivated, to meet deadlines and targets, to concentrate or join in student life. You may also find it difficult to simply sit in a lecture hall or library.

Here are some tips to look after your mental health while you are a student

- **Balance:** Develop a structured, balanced routine that enables you to complete everything you need to get done but includes time for socialising and leisure.
- **Exercise:** Include 30 minutes of exercise in your routine everyday as a way of managing stress and maintaining good physical health.
- **Study:** Find a study method that suits you e.g. the SQ3R method.
- **Eat Well:** Eat a healthy, balanced diet containing plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, lean meat and fish, nuts, seeds, and wholegrain. Avoid too much caffeine, sugary food or junk food which can make you feel sluggish and tired.
- **Set Goals:** Set weekly goals for yourself. Breaking down what may seem to be an overwhelming project into manageable chunks will motivate you to get started. Writing out your goals will help keep you focused. Look up the SMART technique of goal-setting to help you set specific, realistic goals.
- **Budget:** If you are a student living away from home for the first time, keep track of your weekly expenses and income to make sure you have enough money for essentials like rent and food and some left over for yourself.
- **Socialise:** Socialising is important to your mental health. Starting a course in a new college can be a lonely experience. If you have difficulty making friends try joining a society so that you meet people with similar interests.
- **Know the risks:** While in university many people experiment with drugs and alcohol both of which can affect your mental health. Educate yourself on the risks associated with any substance before you take it and seek help if you have any adverse reactions.
- **Talk to Someone:** If you are feeling very stressed or overwhelmed talk to a school or college counsellor. It may also help to talk to a close friend or family member or phone a helpline such as The Samaritans 1850 609090.

If you would like to see an occupational therapist to discuss your specific needs ask your G.P. for a referral or find a list of occupational therapists at www.aoti.ie