

## Mental Health Tips 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 to our lives. Being in school or college can be a stressful experience for you especially during exam times. If you are experiencing stress or mental health difficulties you may find it difficult to be motivated, to meet deadlines, 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 for students to help you look after your mental health:

- **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. Use 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 for 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 or club to meet people with similar interests. Make time for friends.
- **Know the risks:** While in university many people experiment with drugs and alcohol both of which can affect your mental health. Educate yourself about 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](http://www.aoti.ie)