



Mental Health and Well-Being

What About Mental Health?

You are embarking on a new life in Australia and settling into this new environment and culture will present some challenges. Research has shown a high incidence of mental health issues in international students¹.

Stress: Signs to Watch For

Stress can be a primary trigger for mental-health episodes. Experiencing a certain level of stress is a natural part of life. There are times, however, when the levels of stress can exceed what you can cope with.

Signs and symptoms of stress

- Persistent physical symptoms, such as headaches, digestive disorders and chronic pain that do not respond to routine treatment
- Decreased energy, fatigue
- Muscle tension
- High blood pressure
- Elevated heart-rate or Palpitations
- Appetite - comfort eating or loss of appetite
- Low self-esteem
- Inability to sleep
- Irritability.

Triggers of stress

- Adjusting to a new environment - separation from family and friends
- Financial mismanagement
- Diversity –cultural adjustment
- Inability to balance work, family roles and expectations
- Demanding study schedule and coping with technological change
- Lack of social and familial support networks.

Effects of stress

- May include:
- Poor decision-making
- Poor academic performance
- Loss of ability to focus or concentrate
- Constantly feeling harassed
- Low morale
- Self-isolation
- Deteriorating relationships
- Conflict with peers or friends.

Managing and Enhancing Mental Health

- Reach out, form friendships in your community and interact with other students, church, support groups and join student associations or clubs
- Seek out help and support from Student Contact Officers (SCOs), counsellors, academic staff, friends, family and professionals
- Manage your time well and aim for a study, work, and recreation life balance
- Stay healthy by eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly
- Develop and maintain a positive frame of mind and attitude towards life and challenges.

When to seek help

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Anxiety
- Paranoia
- Depression
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Increase in alcohol consumption
- Obsessive or controlling behaviour
- Anti-social behaviour
- Experiencing signs and symptoms of stress/ depression for one week or more
- Physical illness that is not explainable
- Suicidal thoughts.

¹This factsheet provides you with information on how to manage your mental health, including tips on the signs to watch for and resources that are available in Australia





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Why you should seek help

- Most mental illness is treatable and manageable
- Continuous feeling of stress and depression may lead to more severe psychological or mental breakdown
- Excessive stress or depression when not addressed may exacerbate other physical illnesses
- Excessive stress or depression may jeopardise your studies.

What to do and where to go

At any one time, someone your age, gender, nationality or in similar circumstances will be experiencing what you are going through. Help is always available if you reach out.

- Seek advice from a student counsellor or a qualified health practitioner
- Exercise - make time so it is part of a routine
- Engage in creative or recreational activities that are of interest to you such as art, photography, sports etc.
- Share your feelings with a trusted friend, peer or family members.

Things to avoid

- Do not self-medicate
- Alcohol and drug abuse: substance abuse can mask depression, making it harder to recognise and treat
- Not disclosing underlying illnesses, disease or disability: if you are experiencing a condition and have not sought help due to denial or fear of stigma, this can affect your mental health and well-being. Talk to student counsellors/ SCO, Palladium staff or trusted friends
- Do not procrastinate: seek help as your condition may worsen.
- Self-isolation

Other useful resources

Australia is an open society and there are many sources of information and services on mental health available at:

- www.sane.org.au
- www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
- www.beyondblue.com.au
- www.mhima.or.au

The Australia Awards is committed to providing fair and equitable support to all Recipients, including those with mental health illness. Under Australian law universities cannot discriminate against students who have need for support due to mental health illness. Universities are required to put in place reasonable support that a student may require to complete their studies (Refer to: www.adcet.edu.au/Cats/Understanding_Disability/Legislative_Context.chpx). To receive this type of assistance it is important to reach out and seek advice. There is a strong and positive commitment by all to provide as much support as possible to Recipients.

The Australia Awards are managed in Africa by Palladium on behalf of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

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