



Northumbria
University
NEWCASTLE

YOUR WELLBEING TOOLKIT

The Importance of Looking After Ourselves

Just like our physical health, mental health is something we all have and must look after. Particularly at university when things get a bit more stressful, we may need some new ways to care for ourselves and our mental wellbeing.

This booklet is a little wellbeing toolkit full of useful strategies and coping skills to help you maintain positive wellbeing during your student life and beyond.

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Preparing for Student Life

Becoming a student is an incredible opportunity for new experiences. Here are some ways you can make your student journey as smooth as possible:

Planning your healthcare

If at present you're receiving treatment for your mental health, please be aware that starting university may mean having to change GP and the support you receive might be slightly different. To minimise disruption, it could be useful to talk to your current GP or Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) about:

- Changing healthcare providers and the challenges it may bring to your treatment
- How medical notes will be transferred to ensure your new GP understands your medical needs
- Whether any of the medications you are currently taking can affect your learning
- Consider writing a summary letter about your medical history to your new GP

The NHS has more information about how you can register with a new GP as a student:

nhs.uk/nhs-services/getting-medical-care-as-a-student



Managing finances

It is normal for students to experience some financial challenges during their academic journey. Therefore, it is important to consider how you will pay for essentials such as housing, food, fees, and course costs such as books.

To help you get to grips with all-things money, we have partnered with Blackbullion to offer all Northumbria University students free access to an interactive financial wellbeing platform.

Blackbullion is full of practical financial education and resources to help you:

- Develop your money skills and confidence
- Maximise your opportunities
- Start growing your financial wellbeing

Create an account here: blackbullion.com

Managing your studies

You may be continuing your education from school or college or perhaps you've taken a break and you're now returning to education. Whatever your situation, managing your studies can be overwhelming at times.

Take advantage of Northumbria's Skills Plus, a collection of online skills, designed to support your learning.

library.northumbria.ac.uk/skillsplus

But what if things don't go according to plan?

- Have a plan B, a different work schedule if your routine is disrupted
- Regularly schedule 'spare time' to give yourself time to catch up
- Talk to your tutor about assignment extensions or flexible arrangements in advance, to give yourself enough time if you're under a lot of pressure.



Maintaining Positive Mental Wellbeing

What is mental wellbeing?

Mental wellbeing is about your thoughts and feelings and how you navigate the ups and downs of everyday life. Good mental wellbeing doesn't mean you're always happy, but having poor mental wellbeing can make everyday life more challenging.

There are lots of different ways we can take care of our mental wellbeing:

- **Socialise!** Connect with others; friends, people on your course, or join a society. Why not make new friends by trying some of the discounted events and activities available here: northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/be-part-of-it
- **The basics:** look after your body by getting enough sleep, trying to eat a balanced diet and doing regular exercise/movement if you can.
- **Create a routine;** simply put, the fuller your days are the less time you will have to feel homesick or lonely. Plan things to do at the beginning of the week and stick to the plan.
- **Relaxation:** try mindfulness, breathing techniques, yoga, take a relaxing walk, or put on some relaxing music.
- Keep in touch with **family and friends.**

And remember.... Give yourself time to adjust and take it day by day.

If things are difficult for you at the moment and the following tips feel unmanageable, it's OK to ask for help.

See the '**Help at Northumbria**' and '**Helpful Contacts**' sections in this guide for further information and support.

Managing Student Stress

Becoming a student involves a lot of changes and the likelihood is that you will experience some challenges associated with student life. These challenges may induce feelings of stress and anxiety. This is very normal. Stress can sometimes help motivate us to achieve our goals.

Some of the challenges you may come across include:

- Balancing studying, deadlines, work, and social life
- Managing money and budgeting
- Meeting new friends
- Leaving home and being independent possibly for the first time
- Homesickness

It's good to be aware that too much stress isn't good for us. Think of stress as a bucket: if we keep adding stressors to the bucket, over time it will fill up and eventually overflow. This is why it is important that we pay particular attention to our wellbeing during stressful periods. Spotting the signs and causes of our stress can help us to manage it. Signs of stress include feeling anxious, nervous or depressed, losing interest in activities and life, feeling like you can't switch off, feeling more irritable or impatient, having trouble sleeping, feeling exhausted or tired, being unable to concentrate, changes to diet, and feeling restless or fidgeting a lot.

You may have previously noticed some of these things in yourself or others and not realised that they were signs of stress. Knowing how you are impacted by stress can help you to manage these feelings in the future. So, how can you better manage stress?

TIPS FOR MANAGING STRESS

Identify and address

Work out what may be causing you stress so that you can be better prepared for moving forward. It may be regular events, ongoing events, or major one-offs.

When you have identified these events or triggers, you can attempt to address some of them in practical ways.

Organisation

Organising and managing your time effectively can help you to feel better prepared in high-pressure situations, particularly when you have tight deadlines, exams, or a lot of tasks to complete.

Here are a few ways you could organise your time:

- **Make lists** of all tasks and order them in terms of importance or urgency. You can then create timetables to help divide your time.
- **Set SMART goals** which divides tasks up into smaller, achievable goals to help you feel more in control.
- **Ask for help** from friends, family members or flatmates who can help with your daily tasks.

Self-care

Make time for yourself each day. Create a healthy balance and make sure you plan activities that give you a sense of pleasure and enjoyment, as well as relaxing activities.

Acceptance

Accept that there may be some things you won't be able to control. This can help focus your attention on other tasks instead.

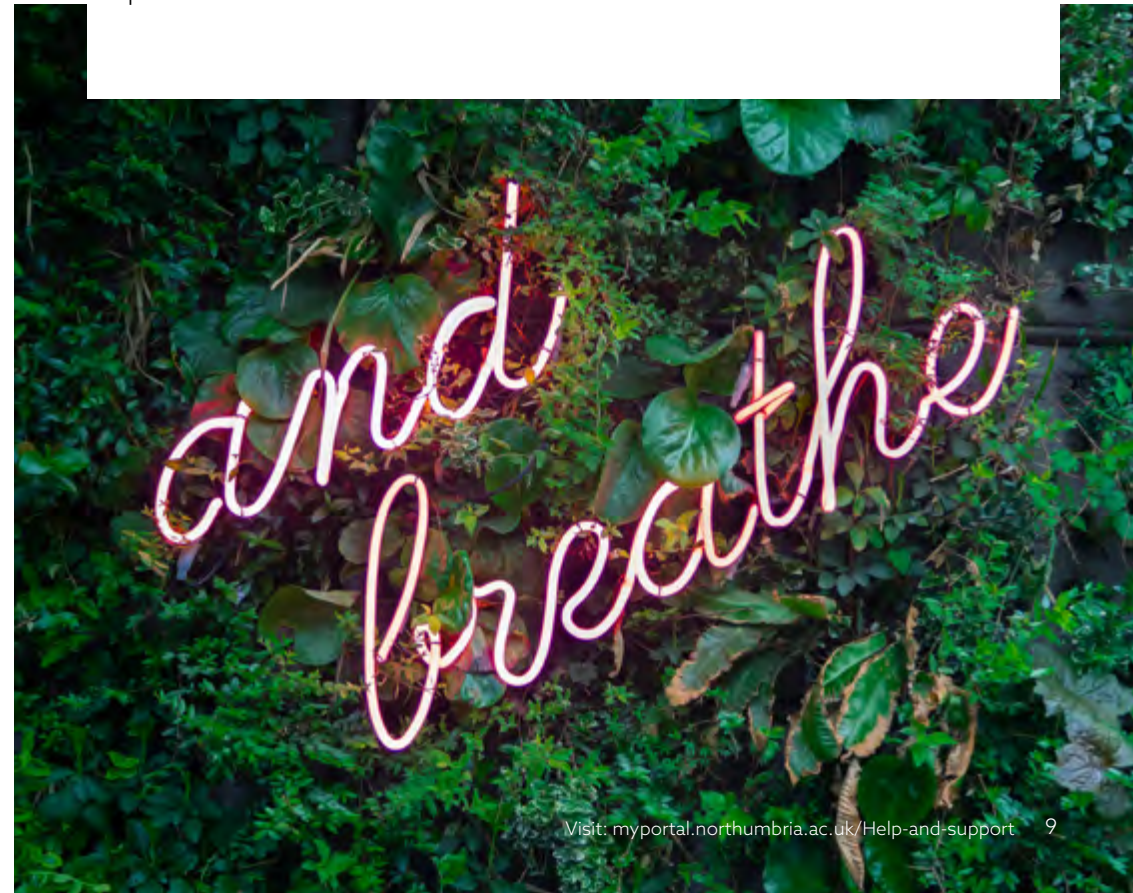
Anxiety

Stress can affect your mental health and is also closely linked to anxiety.

Anxiety can be described as a feeling of worry, nervousness, or fear especially around future events. Much like stress, anxiety can actually be helpful in some instances as it is the body's natural threat response, otherwise known as 'fight or flight'. However, at times, it can feel very distressing and cause us to avoid situations, keeping us in a cycle of fear.

TIPS FOR MANAGING ANXIETY

Self-care is very important when managing anxiety. Here are some tips on how to look after yourself during anxious periods.



Looking after yourself

Make sure you are maintaining a good diet. Consuming a lot of caffeine and sugar can increase the physical symptoms of anxiety such as, increased heart rate and disrupted sleep. Getting enough sleep at night will help improve your energy levels and mood. Physical activity can also be a really effective way of improving your mental wellbeing and decreasing anxiety, so why not try out a new sport or spend some time outdoors?

Keep a diary

Making a note of your mood and what impacts it can help you to spot signs and triggers of anxiety. Identifying specific 'worry time' where you can focus on what may be worrying you and writing it down can help to address what is making you anxious.

Mindfulness and paying attention to the present moment

Paying more attention to the present moment can improve your mental wellbeing. This includes your thoughts, feelings, body and the world around you.

Some people call this awareness "mindfulness". Mindfulness can help you to understand yourself a bit better and enjoy life more. It can positively change the way you feel about your life and how you approach challenges. This can be done through breathing exercises, using imagery, touch, or sounds.

Why not try a few and see which work best for you? Check out our helpful resources page for useful apps, podcasts and guided meditation to practice mindfulness.

Low Mood and Depression

It is normal to experience some low mood whilst at university. You may know the reason for your low mood (e.g. homesickness, loneliness, relationship difficulties), or you may not.

Symptoms of low mood include: irritability, tiredness, sleeping too much or too little, changes to food habits, finding it hard to concentrate, being preoccupied with your thoughts, feeling tearful, not wanting to be around people, finding it hard to manage everyday tasks, difficulty taking care of your personal hygiene and not wanting to do things you normally enjoy.

There is a lot of research that shows that what you do, or don't do, has a direct impact on your mood. Being active and doing things that matter to you, even if at first you don't feel like it, improves your overall mood. There are various things that you can try to help improve your mood:

- Find an activity that gives you enjoyment and meaning. Activities which give us a sense of purpose positively impact our mood
- Practice gratitude. Notice the small positives each day.
- Challenge your negative thoughts: can you view things in a more balanced way? If a friend was feeling this way, what might you say to them?

Depression and suicide

If you have been feeling very low for a significant amount of time and it is affecting your ability to carry out your usual tasks, you may have depression. This is a medical term for severe and long-lasting low mood. If you think that you may have depression you can still try all of the activities above, however you may also want to let your GP know how you are feeling as well as someone close to you, such a friend or a family member. You may also feel that it would be helpful to get some professional help from a trained mental health professional. More information can be found at the end of this booklet.

Sometimes when people are feeling very low or depressed, they can have thoughts of wanting to end their life or of suicide. This is normal and you shouldn't feel shame for feeling and thinking this way. It is important to share thoughts of suicide with someone who you trust and someone you feel may be able to help you. There is more information about who to contact on the next pages of this booklet.

Help at Northumbria

There are a number of options available to support your mental health and wellbeing during your time at Northumbria from self-help resources to one-to-one appointments.

You can access the article '**An overview of mental health and wellbeing support at Northumbria**' in Ask4Help Online on your Student Portal to find out more about the types of support available.

Book an appointment with the Wellbeing Team

For access to free, confidential, one-to-one mental health support please see the article '**Registering for support from the Mental Health and Wellbeing Team**' in Ask4Help Online on your Student Portal and complete our short registration form.



Helpful Contacts

- **ASK4HELP:** for all general Student Life enquiries.
Phone: 0191 2274646
Ask4Help Online: myportal.northumbria.ac.uk/Help-and-support
- **SHOUT:** text help by trained volunteers for people in crisis.
Text: 85258
- **ANXIETY UK:** offers a helpline and instant messaging/live chat service with other helpful information and resources.
Phone: 03444 775 774, Text Support: 07537 416 905
- **STUDENT MINDS:** In collaboration with The Mix, web chat, phone and email support for students.
Phone: 0808 189 5260, email: students@themix.org.uk
- **SAMARITANS:** 24 hour a day phone support.
Phone: 116 123
- **VITA HEALTH GROUP:** a free and confidential service for adults 16+ who live, and are registered with a GP in Newcastle. If you are struggling with low mood, depression, anxiety or worry, you can self-refer to this service.
Online: vitahealthgroup.co.uk/nhs-services/nhs-mental-health/newcastle
- **EATING DISTRESS NORTH EAST (EDNE):** offer independent confidential services to people affected by eating distress across the North East of England.
Online: edne.org.uk
- **IF YOU CARE SHARE:** provide a range of services fundamental to their three main aims of prevention, intervention and supporting those bereaved by suicide.
Online: ifucareshare.co.uk
- **NEWCASTLE TREATMENT AND RECOVERY (NTaR):** covers all of drug and alcohol services within Newcastle and is an ageless service.
Phone: 0191 206 1117, email: NTARreferrals@cntw.nhs.uk

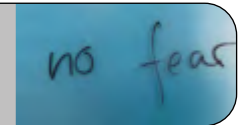
My Wellbeing Plan

This page is your own personalised wellbeing plan. The purpose of this is to build your awareness of possible stressors within your life, and helpful ways to approach these.

THINGS THAT MAKE ME HAPPY:



IN A CRISIS I NEED TO:



THINGS I SHOULD TAKE NOTICE OF:



THINGS I CAN DO TO KEEP ME ACTIVE:



THINGS TO AVOID/OR THAT STRESS ME OUT:



THINGS I CAN LEARN:



THINGS THAT CALM AND SOOTHE ME:



PEOPLE I CAN CONNECT WITH:





Helpful Resources

Online Self-Help Materials

Programmes designed to help you improve and maintain your wellbeing:

- **SilverCloud:** northumbriauniversity.silvercloudhealth.com/signup

Need to Relax and Unwind?

Try these Youtube Meditation channels:

- **Goodful Channel**
- **The Honest Guys Meditations**
- **Great Meditation**

Useful Apps:

General Wellbeing:

- **Happify**
- **Whats Up?**
- **CBT Thought Diary**

Meditation/Mindfulness:

- **Headspace**
- **Ten Percent Happier**
- **Calm**

Anxiety Management:

- **Clear Fear**
- **Mindshift**

Self Harm/Suicide Prevention:

- **Stay Alive**
- **Calm Harm**

Fancy a podcast? Try these:

- **The Happiness Lab**
- **The Well Mind Podcast**
- **Conversations about Student Mental Health**
- **Students of Mind**
- **Shine a Light On**
- **Not Perfect**
- **The MIND Mental Health Podcast**

Contact Us

Current students can find further information and support via Ask4Help Online on the Student Portal:

myportal.northumbria.ac.uk/Help-and-support

northumbria.ac.uk/slw

