

Health and well-being

The term “health and well-being” covers a range of physical and psychological health factors. Well-being includes satisfaction with aspects of your daily life such as your living arrangements, lifestyle balance and confidence in making the transition to the Australian cultural and academic environment. So, this topic is not just about your physical health, but also how you feel about your life in Australia.

When adjusting to life in Australia you should be aware there are some useful guidelines about enjoying social places, and taking a responsible approach to drinking alcohol, and protecting your physical safety. Being a successful and well-adjusted student means knowing how to stay healthy by choosing enjoyable activities, exercise and sport, and what to do in case you are injured. This includes increasing your energy levels, managing stress, sleeping well and feeling better about yourself by improving your general well-being.

Healthy living

Australian people have a reputation for an enthusiasm towards a range of sports and activities. There are a number of Government and community-based programs in Australia that promote opportunities to encourage people to live fitter, happier and healthier lifestyles. This includes eating the 'right' foods, being more active and enjoying more of your life. Staying active is an important way to stay healthy. Choose activities and exercise you enjoy, and be prepared to learn new skills, in sport and other activities. Recreational exercise is a great way to balance the time you are studying at a desk, and to improve your body's mobility.

Whatever activity you do; it may benefit you in the following ways:

- increasing your energy levels
- managing stress levels
- increasing your flexibility and mobility
- feeling better about yourself and improving your well-being.

Sport and leisure

Australia is well known for its wide participation in sports and being active spectators. As a student you are encouraged to become familiar with sporting activities, to play and to watch, in your local area. This way you will meet Australian people and enjoy healthy recreation. Leisure activities also include visiting art galleries, museums, exhibitions, music pursuits and outdoor shows. These are easily found on websites and in local newspapers.

Being careful when exercising

If you are doing exercise that is unfamiliar to you, and you have not exercised for a while, you need to be careful about possible injury. Take care when you are exercising or playing sport in particular types of weather, such as hot summers or cold winters. Make sure you:

- warm up (muscle stretches)
- drink plenty of water
- wear appropriate clothing and footwear

Here are some quick tips about how to avoid injury or adverse effects while exercising:

- stop and rest if you experience symptoms like shortness of breath, dizziness, pain in the chest, cramps or fainting
- if these symptoms occur regularly contact a doctor
- if you receive an injury during exercise or activity, assess whether you need medical attention

Making friends and staying connected

- There is no magic trick to making friends, but being connected to a friendship network is very important for your well-being, and your confidence in adjusting to Australian life. If you are in a foreign culture it can seem more difficult than usual to find people who you really “get along” with. Be kind to yourself –making friends takes time.
- It's a good idea to get involved in local community activities to meet people with whom you have common interests. If you make the most of social opportunities during your life in Australia, just as you would back home, it will be quicker and easier for you to fit in, make friends and feel at home.
- Become involved with the student club or society at your Education Provider. This is a great way to meet other new students in a safe environment.
- However, you meet people, remember to be careful. When you meet someone new, be cautious until you get to know the person better and feel you can trust him or her.
- If a stranger starts talking to you, they are probably just being friendly. But be safe, and don't give them any of your personal details such as your full name, your phone number or your address. With people you don't know well, always arrange to meet them in a public place, like a café or a park, instead of inviting them to your home or going to theirs, until you feel you have built a relationship with them, know more about them and feel comfortable with them.
- Many International Students spend time with other students and people from their own country and culture while they're in Australia. These people can make you feel accepted and you may be able to communicate much more easily with them than you can with the locals, particularly when you have just arrived. When everything around you is

new and different, it can feel good to find people from your own country and cultural background. You still need to be careful at first, until you get to know them better.

- If you have any concerns or questions about someone you have met, or want to talk to someone about Australian mannerisms and communication “norms” (widely acceptable behaviour), make an appointment with your International Student Advisor.

Study in Australia website: <http://www.studyinaustralia.gov.au>

Time management

It is common knowledge that time management is an essential skill for successful study. It is a matter of choice how we use the time we have. We can either allow time to control our activities or we can make time work for us by establishing priorities and scheduling our work. Effective time management is about getting more done with your available time. Effective time management involves learning a number of skills, including:

- Goal setting: knowing what you are trying to achieve. This helps you to stay motivated and manage your time more effectively. To set goals, you need to decide on your long term, medium term and short term goals. The time frames will vary for each individual.
- Prioritising and getting the most done in the most efficient and effective way. Time is limited and valuable, so it must be allocated wisely.
- Planning your time: planning ahead and taking control of your time. Planning regularly allows you to achieve your goals, monitor your progress and prevent time wastage.
- Allocating a balance of time for study, exercise, socialising and sleep is essential to maintain a happy and healthy lifestyle.

The importance of good sleeping patterns

Good quality sleep isn't necessarily a long sleep – it's having what doctors call 'deep sleep' and 'dream sleep'. Most 'deep sleep' occurs during the first five hours after falling asleep. Even if you sleep for only four or five hours, you can still get about the same amount of 'deep sleep' as someone who sleeps for eight to ten hours.

Illness, pain or depression can disrupt sleep. Our ability to get good quality sleep can be disrupted by physical illness, infections, pain during the night and psychological stress. This can lead to:

- difficulty in getting to sleep
- poor quality sleep
- less sleep
- frequently waking during the night
- waking very early in the morning and being unable to get back to sleep.

Poor quality 'deep sleep' can lead to:

- tiredness or poor concentration during the day
- irritability
- aches and pains in the muscles and bones
- an immune system that doesn't work well, leading to more frequent illness
- periods of depression.

Here are some things you can do to improve your sleep:

When you wake up in the morning

- get out of bed as soon as you wake. Don't go back to sleep or try to make up for 'lost sleep'.
- try to get up at about the same time each day
- go outside into the fresh air
- do some physical activity, for example, go for a walk.

During the day

- do not nap. If you nap, you'll be less tired when you go to bed and you'll probably take longer to fall asleep
- if you're worrying about things during the night, set aside some time for problem-solving during the day
- keep a sleep-wake diary
- review your sleep-wake progress with your doctor at each visit
- during the day, try to be physically active
- avoid drinking caffeine after 4pm and try not to drink more than two cups of caffeine-type drinks each day such as coffee, strong tea, cola or energy drinks
- (It may be advisable that keeping sensible bed times is not just good for one's sleep patterns and well-being, but to stay up late talking loudly on Skype or watching TV may be impolite to your host family or flatmates)

http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=90.621

Managing stress and life-study balance

What is Stress?

Stress is simply our response and reactions to stressors (situations) in our lives and how we handle them. Each individual copes with different stresses in different ways. One person may become stressed over something minor that another person thinks is not stressful at all. What everyone needs is enough skills to cope with the amount and types of stress we experience.

There is nearly always some stress in our lives. As an International Student living away from home in a new country, stress can be caused by school work, new technology, exams, studying, friends, partners and working. Homesickness (being away from home) can also cause stress.

How do I know if I'm stressed?

There are warning signs that let us know if we are stressed, and when you don't deal with your stress you can become quite ill. Some physical signs of severe stress are:

- headaches
- feeling sick
- nausea
- indigestion
- irregular sleep
- sore muscles
- diarrhoea or constipation
- lack of concentration
- skin rashes
- hair loss

Some feelings that indicate stress are:

- anxiety
- nervousness
- sadness
- tension
- tiredness

Coping with Stress

Here are some ideas that may be useful to cope with stress:

- Positive self-talk – use your own mind to help yourself – decide how you are going to cope with the stress – remain positive. Also, self-talk may assist you in assessing the true nature and depth of your problems, and to find a place that you can work back to when life was less stressful.
- Relaxation – You know what activities help you to relax, try to include these activities in your weekly schedule. This will help reduce stress and prevent stress.
- Meditation - There are various ways we can meditate - friends, classes or apps. Exercise – Some people find exercise alleviates stress.
- A healthy diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as a balance of all the major food groups to ensure you are getting all the vitamins and minerals you require. And ensure that you drink plenty of water each day.
- Maintaining friendships and having friends with whom you can talk about problems.

- A balanced lifestyle – if we can achieve a good balance in our lives this helps us cope well. We need to have a good balance between relationships, social life, spiritual needs, rest, relaxation, exercise and healthy eating.
- Get help and advice from a specialist, such as a counsellor or health professional if you are in a stressful situation.

Counselling services

Counselling is very helpful for many reasons, particularly when you are trying to balance study, work, and adjust to a new country. Counselling services, either provided at your Education Institution or in the community, can help you with:

- motivation, stress and time management
- referral to academic support, safety issues
- wellbeing and health programs
- psychological health.

General health

Australia offers one of the world's healthiest environments, and has a diverse choice of wonderful healthy food. Those in Australia enjoy one of the healthiest lifestyles on the planet. While you are in Australia, you too may consider how you can improve your health and live a healthy lifestyle. After all, if you are not healthy, how can you enjoy the country, your friendships, your study and all that you came here for?

Eating well

After arriving in Australia for the first time, you may be unfamiliar with the food available, and it may take a while to find ingredients from your home country.

Australia has so many varieties of food because of its cultural diversity, so you should feel 'at home' before too long. At the same time, be aware that fats, sugars and additives in food need to be monitored, to maintain a nutritious and balanced diet.

Water from the tap is safe to drink in Australia. Everyone should consume a couple of litres each day to stay hydrated, especially in hot climates.

<http://www.healthyactive.gov.au/internet/healthyactive/publishing.nsf/Content/com-schools-grants-state-terr-gov>

Alcohol Consumption

In Australia, alcohol is the most commonly used recreational drug, but it is illegal to buy or consume alcohol in Australia if you are younger than 18 years of age. It is also illegal for people over 18 years old to buy alcohol for someone who is under 18.

It is important to remember that if you reside in a country where the legal drinking age is older than 18 years old, you should be cautious while drinking in Australia. Be careful, limit your alcohol intake and only drink in a safe environment.

In Australia, people drink alcohol at social functions. If you are invited to dinner or a party, it is most likely that alcohol will be served there. However, alcohol has well-documented toxic effects on the body.

You should avoid alcohol if you:

- have a cultural or religious stance against drinking alcohol
- have a physical condition made worse by alcohol
- have a mental health problem made worse by alcohol
- are taking medications
- are pregnant
- simply just do not want to drink alcohol.

In Australia, people are very tolerant and understanding of other people's beliefs and decisions, so you can politely decline an offer of alcohol at any time without offending.

It is possible to drink at a level that is less risky, while still having fun. There are a number of things you can do to make sure you stay within low risk levels. These include:

- set limits for yourself and stick to them
- start with non-alcoholic drinks and alternate with alcoholic drinks
- drink slowly
- try drinks with a lower alcohol content
- eat before or while you are drinking.

Standard Drinks

The use of standard drinks can help people to monitor their alcohol consumption and exercise control over the amount they drink. Different types of alcoholic drinks contain different amounts of pure alcohol. A standard drink is defined as one that contains 10 grams of pure alcohol.

The below are examples of approximately one standard drink:

- a middy of beer (285ml)
- a nip of spirits (30ml)
- a small glass of wine (100ml)
- a small glass of fortified wine such as sherry (60ml).

Keep in mind:

- Some hotels don't serve standard drinks - they might be larger glasses. Large wine glasses can hold two standard drinks - or even more!
- Drinks served at home often contain more alcohol than a standard drink.
- Cocktails can contain as many as five or six standard drinks, depending on the recipe.
- Pre mixed bottled drinks often contain more alcohol than a standard drink.
- You are not permitted to drive a motor vehicle if your blood alcohol level is 0.05 or more. Typically, this is reached after 2 standard drinks in the first hour, and then maintained with one drink per hour after that. If you are driving a car on a provisional licence (P-plates), you are not allowed to have any trace of alcohol in your body. Police do random breath testing for alcohol, and are very strict about drink driving laws.

Please note: If you are aged 18 years or over, you can bring 2.25 litres of alcohol duty-free into Australia with you. All alcohol in accompanied baggage is included in this limit.

<http://www.alcohol.gov.au>

Smoking Tobacco/Cigarettes

Tobacco smoking is the single largest preventable cause of premature death and disease in Australia. It is responsible for the greatest disease burden and accounts for approximately 15,500 deaths per annum.

Regulations have been introduced to restrict smoking in and around public places, such as shopping centres, hotels, restaurants and dining areas, some beaches and in most workplaces. This is largely for public health reasons. It is illegal to buy, smoke or provide 'smoking products' to people younger than 18 years of age. You will need to produce photo identification to purchase any Tobacco products.

Reasons to quit

Every cigarette you don't smoke is doing you good. There are many health benefits to quitting, some of which you'll be able to notice within hours or days of giving up smoking. You'll also notice the extra money in your pocket you've saved from quitting as cigarettes are quite expensive in Australia.

Please note that are restrictions on how many cigarettes you can bring into Australia from overseas with you. If you are over the age of 18 years old, you are allowed to bring 50 cigarettes or 50 grams of cigars or tobacco products duty-free into Australia with you, this includes all accompanied luggage.

<http://www.quitnow.gov.au>

Other drugs

There are many other recreational drugs available in Australia, many of which are illegal for people of all ages. Drugs can appear initially to have positive effects – lifting your mood, relaxing you or even giving you more energy. However, they can also have negative impacts on your mental and physical health, your relationships, and your life in general.

Some drugs, like amphetamines, can increase the likelihood of acting in a violent way, or being the victim of violence. Many of these types of drugs are made in back yard laboratories with no controls over the quality of contents, and many contain poisonous chemicals. When people are highly dependent on drugs, funding their habit can be their top priority and can lead to crime, or risking everything on gambling, only to end up losing. As a student, you should not risk your health or your academic success, deportation or a criminal record, by being influenced by drugs.

Sometimes the pressure to take drugs might start with you. Moving to a new a country or starting at a new school, college, university or job may mean having to make new friends and fit into a new environment. When you are feeling unsure about yourself, you may be more likely to be influenced by others to do things you don't want to do. This includes taking drugs or drinking alcohol. You might think you are boosting your confidence and reducing anxiety about meeting new people. However, you may be risking your health and well-being and very much more instead.

Some ideas to help you manage peer pressure to take drugs:

- say 'no'
- value common interests and try not to judge others
- take action
- change your peer group
- suggest activities that aren't drug related.

<http://www.drugs.health.gov.au/internet/drugs/publishing.nsf/content/youth3>

Using Australian Health Services

General Practitioners (GPs or Doctor)

In Australia you do not have to go to a hospital to see a Doctor. You can see a Doctor (also known as a GP – General Practitioner) in their private practice or medical centre/clinic, with part or the entire Doctor's fee being covered by OSHC [[Overseas Student Health Cover](#)].

You must make an appointment to see a GP. It is important to note that some GP surgeries will request full payment from you at the time of consultation and you will need to present the receipt to claim the rebate back from your health cover provider.

If you have woken in the morning feeling unwell and would like to see a GP that day, you will need to phone the GP's surgery early in the morning (typically 8:00am – 8:30am) for an appointment. Or, you can attend a local medical clinic, but be prepared to wait to see a GP.

Please note however, that it may not be possible to get an appointment on the same day - you may have to wait one or two days before you can see a GP (in some regional areas of Australia it may be a longer).

If you are under 18, your International Student Advisor or Homestay parent can help you find a GP and accompany you to the appointment. If you are a university student, your university may have its own medical centre.

Seeing a GP

When you attend your appointment, the GP will ask you questions about your health and may give you a brief physical examination, such as checking your breathing, your throat, ears, etc. The doctor will then give you some advice regarding management of your illness, and may give you a prescription for some medication. Make sure you tell the Doctor if you are on current medications or suffering from an illness.

If you have had to, or need to, take time off your studies you will need to obtain a medical certificate from the GP to provide to your Education Provider. If your illness is more serious or the GP is unsure of a diagnosis, he or she may refer you for further tests, for example, blood tests or x-rays, or to see a specialist Doctor.

It is important to note that if you are dissatisfied with the diagnosis or service of the doctor you see, you have the right to obtain an opinion from another doctor.

Attending an Australian Hospital

Few private hospitals have emergency departments, so, in an emergency, most Australians rely on the Public Hospital System. If you attend an Emergency Department in a hospital you will be attended to by a triage nurse for information about you, your health cover (OSHC), and your current health condition. The triage nurse will determine the urgency of your condition in comparison to others in need in the emergency room and it is depending on the severity of your condition that you may remain at the emergency room for several hours. At some hospitals you could wait as long as 5-6 hours to see a Doctor. You will be seen as soon as the most urgent patients have been attended to. Emergency department rules may include keeping you a little longer to observe you and ensure that your condition does not change and it is safe to send you home with the recommended treatment. It is the same for all patients – International Students and Australian citizens alike.

There are extensive waiting times for elective surgeries at public hospitals, e.g. for orthopaedic surgery. Private hospitals are very expensive for treatment and hospitalisation.

Medicines and Pharmacies (Chemist)

Doctors' surgeries do not have medications to dispense to you. You must take the prescription given to you by the Doctor to a Pharmacy / Chemist to obtain the medication. You will need to provide the pharmacy with your OSHC card and your full name and address. You will have to wait anywhere from a few minutes to an hour for your prescription medicine to be prepared.

Prescription Medication

Medication prescribed by your Doctor is not free. Many pharmacists will offer you the option of having a "generic" brand of medicine. If the prescription medicine the Doctor has prescribed is also made available at cheaper prices, this option will be offered to you. This is only offered if the content of the medicine is exactly the same as that prescribed by your Doctor. It will, however, assist you to pay less for your medicine.

Over-the-Counter Medication

Pharmacies/chemists also provide a variety of over-the-counter medications useful for treating colds, headaches, allergies, etc. These do not require a prescription. Ask the pharmacist on duty for advice regarding the best medication for your symptoms. Ensure that you advise the pharmacist of any other medications you may be taking.

Dental Services

Dental services in Australia are not covered under Medicare and can be very costly. It may be useful to check with your Education Provider or Agent if you require cover for dental services when you take out your OSHC policy.

Many policies have an extra option to help cover the cost of everyday services like dental care if you get a toothache, physiotherapy for sporting injuries and optical items like prescription glasses and contact lenses. These are not generally covered in the OSHC policy.

Calling an Ambulance

If you need to call an ambulance, dial 000. You will need to tell the operator which emergency service you need.

Ask for the Ambulance service. The operator will ask for your location. Please tell the operator where you are and what the problem is, if you know. The operator may give you instructions on how to help the injured/sick person. The operator may talk to you on the phone until the ambulance has arrived. The operators are trained to speak to people with limited English and will be able to help you.

Interpreter Services

We are lucky in Australia to have a variety of healthcare professionals from many different cultural backgrounds, so you may be able to see a Doctor who speaks your first language. However, if you are having difficulties communicating with your Doctor, the Translation and Interpreter Service (TIS) can be used.

http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/help_with_translating/ or phone 131 450.