

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION



Build your confidence and resilience

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Most people coming to University are leaving home and being away from their established network of friends and family for the first time.

This is a really big change and often one that feels daunting. Remember: You need to give yourself time to adapt to your new surroundings and build new friendships.

You might feel that you aren't as confident as usual or not be sure what to say or how to fit in.

Sometimes, right in the middle of all this change, unexpected life events - illness, bereavement or relationship breakdowns - can also happen - which can leave you feeling things are difficult to manage.

These problems - large or small - might completely upset your normal daily routines impacting on eating, your ability to sleep and even take regular exercise. And this, in turn, can prevent or limit your ability to study.

Getting back on track can seem difficult or even impossible.

But there are things you can do to manage the problems, to feel good again and get back in to effective studying.

Can't sleep? Sleep disturbed?

Most of us at some time or other will have experienced periods of poor sleep: trouble getting to sleep, early morning waking, vivid dreams etc. If your sleep is suffering, then it is likely your work is too. Don't delay if you are having problems with sleep. Take action as soon as you can.

- Take a look at our Health and Wellbeing blog 'Tired of being Tired?': <http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/health-and-wellbeing/>
- Try listening to a relaxation tape or podcast
- Read our leaflet on insomnia - www.reading.ac.uk/counselling/advice/cou-leaflets.aspx
- Check out the Counselling and Wellbeing Blackboard resources - there are links to many different and helpful resources available on the web to help you learn how to relax in order to go to sleep or to sleep better
- Come along to one of our 'Life Tools' talks on 'Getting a good night's sleep'. This talk is given termly.

Managing stress effectively – want to know how?

Most of us suffer from 'stress' at some time in our lives.

This might be feeling low or anxious or worrying about academic work and progress or just about life in general. So what can you do to restore your balance?

Understanding that there is a 'mind-body' connection that can explain physical symptoms and the impact on how you feel is important.

If you feel as if something bad will happen or are agitated, are worrying a lot or have difficulties concentrating, this will affect your ability to remember, your confidence and mood.

Of course, stress can also increase your focus, performance, memory, resilience and sense of purpose. It is managing your energy level to deal with demands that is key to your success when studying at university.

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Try to develop sensitivity to your own early warning signals that you are feeling stressed and take action to deal with stress before it becomes too disabling.

We all get stressed by things we care about. WELCOME IT - don't avoid it. UTILISE IT - see the opportunity, trust yourself to manage the situation and this will allow you to develop your resilience. Try the following energy boosters to help manage your stress:

- **Exercise:**

Take a walk round campus, go along to a class at Sportspark or get involved in a team activity such as hockey, football or rugby;

- **Relax:**

Give yourself time off from your studies: try some 'mindful' activities to calm your body and mind. Treat yourself.

- **Sleep:**

Make sure you get enough sleep; check out our advice on our 'Healthy Living information sheet.

- **Eat:**

Ensure your diet is balanced and limit your alcohol intake; the safe limit for alcohol intake is:

- Men: no more than 21 units of alcohol per week, no more than 4 units in any one day;
- Women should drink no more than 14 units of alcohol per week, no more than 3 units in any day.
- Both men and women should have at least 2 alcohol-free days a week.

- **Balance:**

Make sure you balance your studying and social activities;

- **Manage:**

Negative thoughts can always intrude - so be aware of them so you can manage them. Consider going along to the 'Life Tools' talk on 'Mindfulness' to learn some mindful strategies to manage these thoughts and read our 'Mindfulness' leaflet for more information: [Online advice and leaflets](#)

- **Support:**

Try to establish a support network to give you strength when you feel stressed. Talk with friends if you are feeling low and make sure you keep in touch with them.

Developing your personal confidence

Sometimes it seems as if everyone else is having a better time at University than you! 'Facebook' pictures appear to show friends having a great time, while you might feel as though you are finding it hard to build new relationships or settle in to your new way of life or environment.

Your personal confidence takes a knock and this can affect your work too. Suddenly, speaking in public or at group seminars feels impossible.

Your confidence is at rock bottom.

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A second year student summed this up in a feedback comment:

"It's so easy to stop believing in yourself and start doubting if you can achieve your potential."

There are ways to overcome these problems. Here are some simple strategies to try out:

- Even though it might feel hard, try to get involved: start small, ask someone friendly for a coffee after a seminar;
- Join in with activities that involve being with other people - don't stay on your own all the time
- Go along to one of the activities organised by the Peer Support network. They run a 'Wellbeing Cafe' in the Study (the building behind RUSU by the carpark) every Wednesday during term time between 1-2.30pm offering the chance to talk with like-minded students over a cup of tea or coffee;
- show you are interested in what other people have to say;
- invite people to share an activity that's already taking place;
- share your thoughts and feelings within a friendship.

Some of these might feel hard to do, but all can be rewarding, surprisingly quickly.

Keeping in control and avoiding risky situations

Reading is a great place to study and live.

We would like you to really enjoy your time here, but there are some relatively simple things you can do to help you to avoid getting yourself into difficult or risky situations:

- Plan your route home after a night out; <http://www.reading-buses.co.uk>
- If returning to your hall of residence, stick to pathways around campus that are lit and if possible, the ones with security cameras. Consider making use of the campus chaperone service: <http://www.reading.ac.uk/security-services/staying-safe/sec-chaperone-service.aspx>
- Use public transport such as Reading buses and sit near the driver on the late night buses if you are alone: <http://www.reading-buses.co.uk/night-buses-to-reading-university/>
- Keep mobile aware when using your phone in public; never leave it unattended on tables or bars when on a night out;
- 'Pace and space' your drinking; the recommended safe limit is no more than 4 units in any one day for men and 3 units in any one day for women; space your drinking, by having a soft drink or a glass of water between alcoholic drinks;
- When you are out, keep an eye on your drink and ask someone you trust to watch it if you are going to leave it. It's better not to accept drinks bought for you by people you don't know and trust unless you are completely sure nothing has been added to it;
- Look out for your friends on a night out; Keep an eye on them; make sure you know where they are going and with whom and try to make sure no-one has to go home on their own;
- Keep in touch; If you do separate from your Uni friends, make sure they know where you are going and what time you expect to be back! Keep your mobile on and safe.
- Notice who's around you.

The University have a handy guide about keeping yourself and your belongings safe:

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/security/secStayingSafe.pdf>

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Asserting your rights

A lot of the previous advice relates to taking responsibility for yourself and your own personal safety.

Understanding that your behaviour can change under the influence of alcohol and when you are in new or unexpected situations or with people you don't know too well, really matters.

Being aware of what's going on around you and forward planning help you to stay in control and stay safe.

Things to do now: Take a look at some helpful advice by following the links to:

- A Youtube video which explains about the importance of consent in a really clear and easy to understand way: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQbei5JGiT8>
- Our leaflet on personal safety at university: www.reading.ac.uk/counselling/advice/cou-leaflets.aspx
- The RUSU advice page: <http://www.rusu.co.uk/advice/welfareadvice/safetyandsecurity>
- Campus services and security advice and information: <http://www.reading.ac.uk/fmd/campus-services/fmd-cs-security-services.aspx>
- The Suzy Lamplugh Personal safety campaigns: <http://www.suzylamplugh.org/>
- Thames Valley police keeping safe: <http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/crime-prevention/keeping-safe/when-out-and-about.htm>
- <http://thecrimepreventionwebsite.com/personal-security/510/student-security/>